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2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ukraine — Russia-occupied Areas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Significant human rights issues in the occupied areas included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; enforced disappearances; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by Russia's forces or Russia-led proxies; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and transfer of prisoners to Russia; unjust detention; serious problems with the independence of the occupation's "judiciary"; political prisoners or detainees; unjust interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including attacks on civilian infrastructure and cities, resulting in widespread civilian death, enforced disappearances or abductions, forcible transfers of civilian populations, torture, physical abuses, and conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjust arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; severe restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement; inability of citizens to freely change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; forced participation in sham "elections" organized by Russia in violation of international law; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious acts of corruption; serious restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including rape; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups or Indigenous persons, including Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and prohibiting independent trade unions or significant or systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were numerous, documented reports of Russia's forces or their proxies committing arbitrary or unlawful killings in all occupied areas, including Crimea, Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, during the year.

The OHCHR's June report cited 77 known summary executions of civilians by Russia's forces during arbitrary detention between February 2022 and May 2023, as well as the death of one detainee due to torture, inhuman detention conditions, and denial of necessary medical care.

Impunity for Russia's forces' past killings in Crimea was a serious problem. The Russian government tasked the Russian Investigative Committee with investigating whether security force killings in occupied Crimea were justifiable and whether to pursue prosecutions. The HRMMU

reported the Russian Investigative Committee failed to take adequate steps to prosecute or punish officials who committed abuses, resulting in a climate of impunity. The Office of the Prosecutor of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea also investigated security force killings from its headquarters in Kyiv, but de facto restrictions on access to occupied Crimea limited its effectiveness. Human rights observers reported families frequently did not challenge findings in such cases due to fear of retaliation.

On January 20, Russian military forces came to the house of Kostyantyn Kovalevskyy, a resident of the temporarily occupied village of Komysh-Zorya, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, and reportedly killed him after searching his home.

On September 16, Russia's military forces abducted and killed a young couple, Anastasiya and Valeriy Saksahanskyy, in the village of Mali Kopani, Kherson Oblast. Relatives of the deceased alleged they were killed as retribution for their refusal to adopt Russian passports or cooperate with occupation authorities.

In its June report, the UNHRMMU corroborated the authenticity of videos showing members of Russian armed forces torturing and summarily executing two Ukrainian POWs. In one video, a POW was shot, and in the second, a POW was beheaded.

B. DISAPPEARANCE

There were reports of disappearances by or on behalf of Russia and Russia-led occupation authorities. Occupation authorities denied international monitors, including the OHCHR and the OSCE, access to the occupied areas, which made it impossible for monitors to fully investigate disappearances. Human rights groups reported de facto police often refused to register reports of disappearances and intimidated and threatened with detention those who tried to report it. The Ukrainian government and human rights groups believed Russia's security forces kidnapped individuals for opposing Russia's occupation as a measure to instill fear in the population and prevent dissent.

The OHCHR reported occupation authorities had not prosecuted anyone in relation to the forced disappearances from Crimea since 2014. NGO and press reports widely reported that occupation authorities were responsible for the disappearances. For example, in 2014 Revolution of Dignity activists Ivan Bondarets and Valeriy Vashchuk telephoned relatives to report police in Simferopol, Crimea, had detained them at a railway station for displaying a Ukrainian flag. Relatives had no communication with them since, and the whereabouts of the two men remained unknown.

The OHCHR documented 996 individual cases of arbitrary detention perpetrated by Russia's forces from February 2022 to July. Eighty detainees died in detention or were found dead with signs of violence, 468 remained in arbitrary detention. Ukrainian government and civil society sources indicated that, in total, tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians had been detained by Russia's forces.

Russia's military forces detained individuals during "filtration" operations in occupied territory, a process used to seek to identify possible affiliation with or support for the Ukrainian armed forces or authorities and to collect information regarding residents in occupied territory. According to the OHCHR, detentions during "filtration" were in most cases arbitrary and in some cases amounted to the enforced disappearance of individuals. Russia's military and their proxies often detained civilians over suspicions regarding their political views, particularly related to pro-Ukrainian sentiments, or other legitimate exercise of freedom of expression. This included local public officials, civil society activists, humanitarian volunteers, and informal leaders of communities, including teachers and priests. Russia's forces held civilian detainees for periods ranging from several days to weeks or months, often incommunicado, in unofficial places of detention. The Ukrainian NGO ZMINA documented 562 cases of abduction between February 2022 and June. The largest number of abductions took place in Kherson and Donetsk Oblasts.

Examples included the disappearance of civilian Leonid Popov in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast in April. Russia's forces held him in the building of the former traffic police for allegedly taking a photograph of Russian military equipment. Russia's forces beat, starved, and deprived him of water. After three months of captivity, Popov was released due to the lack of criminal charges, after which he was admitted to a hospital for exhaustion. On August 2, after his release from the hospital, Russia's forces detained him again. As of October, his whereabouts were unknown.

On March 17, unidentified men abducted Tair Seydametov from the village of Ukromne, Crimea; he was detained and held incommunicado in a Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) building in Simferopol.

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

Russia's forces reportedly employed systematic torture and abuse against the thousands of captured Ukrainian military POWs and detained civilians. Nearly all released captives recounted torture and other physical abuse at the hands of Russia's forces, according to a July report by the OHCHR. Detainees were routinely held incommunicado and in official places of detention, where they were tortured, including through the use of sexual violence, to extract forced confessions, disclose information, or compel cooperation. The OHCHR reported conditions of detention were so dire they could be considered forms of torture under international law. In its October report, the OHCHR documented six additional cases of summary executions of Ukrainian POWs. Of the 56 Ukrainian service members interviewed by the OHCHR between February 1 and July 31, 51 said they were subjected to various forms of torture and mistreatment. According to multiple sources, Russia's forces systematically tortured a subset of civilians and POWs prior to execution. The organization also reported multiple Ukrainian POWs and detainees died as a consequence of poor detention conditions.

There were numerous reports documenting inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees by Russia's forces and their proxies in Crimea, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts. Human rights monitors reported occupation authorities also threatened individuals with violence or imprisonment if they did not testify in court against individuals whom authorities believed were opposed to the occupation. Ukraine's national police identified 52 torture chambers in liberated areas. Most were located in Kharkiv and Kherson Oblasts. According to ZMINA, Russia's forces employed torture against civilians as a tool of suppressing resistance. Tactics included electrocution, beatings, psychological abuse, and forcing individuals to witness the torture of other detainees.

According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, "[t]he use of torture by the FSB [Federal Security Service] and the Russia-led forces against Ukrainian citizens became a systematic and unpunished phenomenon after Russia's occupation of Crimea." Human rights monitors reported Russia's occupation authorities particularly subjected Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians to physical abuse. For example, on May 30, FSB officers detained Kyrylo Barannyk in Simferopol. They reportedly put a plastic bag over his head and brought him to the FSB office. During the interrogation, law enforcement officers tortured him with electric current and simulated drowning with his hands and legs tied with tape. Torture sessions often lasted for as long as six hours. FSB officers threatened to rape Barannyk and kill his mother if he did not confess to a crime. He was charged with damaging railway tracks on February 23 in the village of Poshtove.

According to Ukrainian news sources, on July 18, Russia's forces abducted Serhiy Spartesnyy, an employee of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, and took him to the local occupation police station. Occupation authorities reportedly searched his digital records, including computers, telephones, and social media networks. Spartesnyy remained in detention as of November 26, and occupation authorities had not released any information on charges brought against him or his medical state.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions in Crimea, and in Donetsk, Kherson, Lugansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts reportedly remained harsh and life threatening due to overcrowding, poor conditions, lack of heating and medical care, poor food quality, and insufficient potable water.

Abusive Physical Conditions: According to the Ukraine 5 AM Coalition, occupation authorities maintained an extensive network of unofficial detention centers in the Russia-occupied areas, mainly located in basements, sewage wells, garages, and industrial enterprises. According to ZMINA, women detainees were denied medical care, including sexual and reproductive health care. OHCHR documented poor conditions of detention in many unofficial places of detention. It interviewed 65 detainees held in such places of detention; 17 of them reported that they often had to sleep on the floor or sitting on chairs and were not provided with sufficient food. In several cases, the detainee's hands were tied overnight or were strapped to radiators.

According to a May report by the UN secretary-general on the situation in Crimea, Russian law enforcement officers "subjected the victims to torture and ill-treatment, with a view to extracting information, including passwords for their electronic devices, and obtaining self-incriminating statements or testimony against third persons. The methods included beatings with bare hands or wooden sticks, suffocation, the twisting [of] arms or fingers, the use of electric shocks to various body parts, including the earlobes, nipples, and genitals."

Russian authorities reportedly failed to provide proper medical care to Ukrainian detainees; as a result, detainees Kostyantyn Shyring and Dzhemil Hafarov died in prisons in February.

Prison authorities reportedly retaliated against detainees who refused Russian Federation citizenship by placing them in smaller cells or in solitary confinement.

Administration: Authorities generally did not investigate allegations of torture and mistreatment. Authorities sometimes did not allow prisoners and detainees access to visitors or religious observance. According to defense lawyers, prisoners considered Russian citizens by the Russian Federation were denied Ukrainian consular visits, and most Crimean residents were transferred to prison facilities in Russia without Ukrainian passports.

Independent Monitoring: Occupation authorities did not permit independent nongovernmental observers or international organizations to monitor prison or detention center conditions. Occupation authorities appointed a proxy "ombudsperson," Lyudmyla Lubina, and permitted her access to prisoners in Crimea. Human rights activists regarded Lubina as representing the interests of Russia's occupation authorities and did not view her as credible. The HRMMU, COI, and OSCE experts continued to be denied access to detainees in Crimea or those held by Russia-led forces in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia, preventing investigations of what these organizations described as credible claims of torture and abuse in detention centers with conditions that did not meet international human rights standards.

D. UNJUST DETENTION

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in Crimea and the occupied parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

Unjust Detention: Unjust detention of civilians was endemic in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine. According to the OHCHR, victims of unjust detentions by Russia and its proxies after Russia's full-scale invasion were held incommunicado in unofficial places of detention, including warehouses and barns, without access to relatives and lawyers. Some of these individuals were later transferred

to Russian territory. According to its June report, the OHCHR located 161 places of detention used to confine conflict-related detainees. Of those, 124 were located in occupied territory of Ukraine, including five places in Crimea; 35 places of detention were pretrial detention facilities, penitentiary colonies, or temporary camps located in Russia. The OHCHR also identified two places in Belarus used by Russian forces as temporary or transit places of detention for conflict-related detainees and for POWs transferred from the northern regions of Ukraine.

Observers described unjust detention as a policy tool to instill fear, stifle opposition, and inflict punishment on those who opposed the occupation. According to the HRMMU, Russia's forces focused on Crimean Tatars and raided homes of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On January 24, Russian security forces conducted raids in six households in Dzhankoy District. Human rights groups reported occupation authorities prevented those detained and their family members from calling lawyers during the raids. Occupation authorities detained six men on charges of participating in Hizb ut-Tahrir, which was banned in Russia as a "terrorist" group but was legal in Ukraine. Occupation authorities failed to properly identify themselves and refused to inform family members where the men were being taken. Ukrainian government officials rejected the charges against the men as politically motivated. According to human rights defenders, justifications underpinning the detention of alleged members of "terrorist" or "extremist" groups often provided little to no evidence that the suspect posed an actual threat to society by planning or undertaking concrete actions.

Failure to submit to conscription into Russia's armed forces was also used as a basis for unjust detentions. Since 2015 Russia conducted annual spring and fall conscriptions in Crimea, and failure to comply was punishable by criminal penalty. As of September 30, the Crimean Tatar Resource Center estimated more than 60,000 Crimean residents had been conscripted to service in Russia's forces since the beginning of 2014. As of September 30, the Crimean Tatar Resource Center documented 10 criminal and 600 administrative cases brought against Crimean residents for evading military service in Russia's armed forces. On September 29, Russian Federation President Putin signed a decree to conscript 130,000 personnel into the Russian armed forces from October to December, with conscription taking place in all occupied areas of Ukraine. The HRMMU noted in an October report that conscription of protected persons was a grave breach of article 147 of Geneva Convention IV.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

Under Russia's occupation authorities, the judicial system was neither independent nor impartial. Judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys were subject to political directives, and the outcomes of trials appeared predetermined by occupation authorities. The HRMMU noted lawyers defending individuals accused of extremism or terrorism risked facing harassment or similar charges themselves.

On August 16, the "Donetsk People's Republic (DPR)" so-called court found guilty and sentenced Pavlo Artemenko and Anton Romanyuk, POWs from Azovstal, to 24 years in prison. They were charged with "shelling residential buildings of the 'DPR' in spring 2022." Both men were members of the Azov Battalion, a Ukrainian armed forces unit that fought Russian troops in and around Mariupol.

The OHCHR expressed concern that "courts" in occupied areas "continued to sentence civilians for conflict-related crimes in proceedings that did not meet international fair trial standards and could thus amount to war crimes." Human rights groups reported that de facto occupation authorities widely practiced intimidation, pressure, and harassment of lawyers for their professional activities.

Trial Procedures

Occupation authorities did not observe the right to a trial without undue delay and the right to legal counsel. The Ukrainian government's lack of access to Russia-occupied areas complicated investigations into human rights violations and abuses there. Perpetrators of such violations and abuses were rarely held accountable. Russia and Russia-led forces terminated Ukrainian court system functions in areas under their control. Occupied territories did not have an independent judiciary, and the right to a fair trial was systematically restricted. The HRMMU reported that in many cases individuals were not provided with any judicial review of their detention and were detained indefinitely without any charges or trial.

In cases of suspected espionage or when individuals were suspected of having links to the Ukrainian government, closed-door trials by military "tribunals" were held. The "courts" widely relied on confessions reportedly obtained through torture and other forms of coercion. There were nearly no opportunities to appeal the verdicts of these tribunals. Observers noted subsequent "investigations" and "trials" appeared to create a veneer of legality to the "prosecution" of individuals believed to be associated with Ukrainian military or security forces. Occupation authorities intimidated witnesses to influence their testimony.

On March 10, the "Luhansk People's Republic (LPR)" so-called court found guilty and sentenced Maksym Butkevych to 13 years in prison for attempted murder and violating the customs of war in Severodonetsk, a city in Luhansk Oblast occupied by Russia in 2022. He allegedly fired a grenade launcher at two civilians during the battle for the city on June 4, 2022. Message logs between Butkevych and colleagues suggested he was not in Severodonetsk on that day. According to Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, as of November the only communication with the suspect since his capture in June 2022 was a single telephone call Butkevych made to his parents when he told them he was under investigation. Independent lawyers from Russia and Ukraine were unable to communicate with Butkevych or access the case files in the investigation against him. His whereabouts were unknown until December 5, when Russian Federal Penitentiary Service informed his lawyer, who had filed an official information request, that Butkevych was being held in a penal colony in occupied Luhansk Oblast.

Defendants in politically motivated cases in Crimea were increasingly transferred to the Russian Federation for trial. See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied Crimea.

Occupation authorities limited the ability to have a public hearing. According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, occupation authorities banned family members and media from the courtroom for hearings related to charges of Hizb ut-Tahrir membership and other activities deemed subversive under Russia's laws. The courts justified the closed hearings by citing vague concerns regarding the "safety of the participants." The courts failed to publish judgments in these cases.

Occupation authorities interfered with defendants' ability to access an attorney. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, defendants facing terrorism or extremism-related charges were often pressured into dismissing their privately hired lawyers in exchange for promised leniency. Human rights defenders reported occupation authorities retroactively applied Russia's laws to actions that took place before the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

According to ZMINA, as of August, 200 Ukrainian citizens were imprisoned in occupied Crimea or in Russia on political or religious charges, 99 of whom were Crimean Tatar Muslims charged with terrorism. According to the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporary Occupied Territories, as of late September there were 6,670 detained military personnel and more than 25,000 civilians detained in various places of detention by Russia's forces or its proxies.

Charges of extremism, terrorism, or violation of territorial integrity were particularly applied to religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Hizb ut-Tahrir or opponents of the occupation,

such as Crimean Tatars, independent journalists, and individuals expressing dissent on social media. Most of those detained in the occupied territories were either captured members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, those who demonstrated pro-Ukrainian opinions, those suspected of collaborating with the Security Service of Ukraine, civilians suspected of “subversive acts,” those who violated curfew hours, or those who had been held for ransom.

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian actions.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

Russia’s occupation forces evicted persons from their places of residence and seized their property without due process or restitution on a broad scale. In April, Ivan Fedorov, Mayor of occupied Melitopol, reported 674 private homes in Melitopol District had been seized, including more than 10 percent of housing stock in some communities, forcing residents to leave the oblast. Multiple reports indicated Russian military personnel and other persons arriving from Russia occupied the seized housing. In June, media reported occupation authorities seized property from residents in Crimea who did not hold Russian passports. On November 9, Kherson Oblast council deputy Serhiy Khlan reported occupation “police forces” were seizing and redistributing the property of businesspersons who had not re-registered it with occupation authorities.

H. UNJUST INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant laws of Russia and procedures that Russia’s government applied and enforced in Russia-occupied areas. Occupation authorities and others engaged in electronic surveillance, entered residences and other premises without warrants, and harassed relatives and neighbors of perceived opposition figures.

Occupation authorities routinely conducted raids on homes to intimidate the local population, particularly Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and members of Jehovah’s Witnesses, ostensibly on the grounds of searching for weapons, drugs, or “extremist literature.” According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, occupation authorities conducted 53 raids between January and September, 36 of which were in the households of Crimean Tatars.

Human rights groups reported Russia’s authorities exercised widespread authority to tap telephones and read electronic communications and had established a network of informants to report on suspicious activities. Occupation authorities reportedly encouraged state employees to inform on their colleagues who might oppose the occupation. According to human rights activists, eavesdropping and visits by security personnel created an environment in which persons were afraid to express any opinion contrary to the occupation authorities, even in private.

Occupation authorities regularly used recorded audio of discussions concerning religion and politics, obtained through illegal wiretapping of private homes and testimonies from unidentified witnesses, as evidence in court. For example, on May 31, the southern district military court sentenced Jebbar Bekirov to 17 years in a high-security prison, while Rustem Tairov, Rustem Murasov, and Zavur Abdullayev each received 12 years of imprisonment. They were arrested in 2021 and charged with terrorism for alleged participation in Hizb ut-Tahrir. The prosecution presented testimony of FSB officers and interrogation of anonymous witnesses, whose words could not be confirmed in the court, and recorded conversations of the defendants with other men.

In occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, Russia-led forces broke into private homes, raided the premises, and checked whether children were attending Ukrainian classes online. Russia-led forces looted, threatened men with forced mobilization, and terrorized and intimidated individuals in various ways.

I. CONFLICT-RELATED ABUSES

After Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the levels of violence and scope of abuses significantly increased throughout the country. Russia also armed, trained, and led proxy forces composed of mobilized inhabitants of territories under its occupation (including parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts and Crimea). Russia and Russia-led forces throughout the conflict denied access to international monitors, who did not have the access necessary to systematically record violations or abuses committed by Russia and Russia-led forces.

In its April report, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination highlighted Russia's policy of "incitement to racial hatred and propagation of racist stereotypes against ethnic Ukrainians, [and] alleged forced mobilization and conscription, which disproportionately affected ethnic minorities, including indigenous peoples."

The UN Commission of Inquiry documented patterns of willful killings, unlawful confinement, torture, rape, and unlawful transfers of detainees in the areas occupied by Russia's authorities in Ukraine. Violations were also committed against persons deported from Ukraine to the Russian Federation. According to the commission, many of the willful killings, unlawful confinement, rapes, and sexual violence were committed in the context of house-to-house searches, which were aimed at locating supporters of the Ukrainian armed forces or finding weapons. "Detention, interrogation, torture, or ill-treatment often preceded execution. Some victims were found with hands or feet tied. Based on medical records and photographs, the most common method of killing was a gunshot to the head at close range," according to the commission's March report.

During the year, the HRMMU received credible allegations of conflict-related sexual violence against civilians in areas of Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson Oblasts occupied by the Russian Federation. The OHCHR was also investigating mounting allegations of conflict-related sexual violence against men, women, and girls. As of May 15, the HRMMU verified 23 such cases, mostly attributed to Russia-led armed forces. Documented cases included rape, gang rape, forced nudity and forced public stripping, sexual torture, and sexual abuse. The cases occurred in different regions of Ukraine and in a penitentiary facility in the Russian Federation.

Ukraine's Office of the Prosecutor General reported 231 crimes of conflict-related sexual violence. As of September, law enforcement agencies were investigating crimes involving 149 women, 82 men, and 13 minor victims. The actual number of survivors was likely to be significantly higher due to the stigma of reporting such abuses. The age of the victims ranged from four to 82. Sexual violence affected victims of all ages. Family members, including children, were sometimes forced to witness the crimes.

Killings: As of September, the OHCHR recorded 27,449 total civilian casualties, with 9,701 of those killed and 17,748 injured following Russia's full-scale invasion, including 4,621 from February 1 to July 31. Of the total of those killed, 10,611 were in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. The OHCHR estimated the actual figures were considerably higher, but continued fighting constrained its documentation efforts. The OHCHR assessed most of these casualties were caused by missiles, explosive weapons or mines, and explosive remnants of war. Many attacks were indiscriminate or disproportionate with disregard for the presence of large concentrations of civilians or objects accorded special protection under international humanitarian law such as medical units and transport or dams, dikes, and nuclear power plants, which caused the civilian population excessive harm and suffering.

Russia's forces continued to use land mines without fencing, signs, or other measures to mitigate civilian casualties in areas under their control. Russia's forces reportedly mined roads, streets,

fields, urban buildings such as hospitals and civic centers, as well as household objects, including toys and other items children would handle. According to survivors in liberated areas, mass media, and Ukrainian law enforcement, retreating forces of Russia left behind mined areas in disregard for civilian life. Ukrainian law enforcement officials maintained that, in some cases, the mining of territory complicated the discovery of mass burials that offered evidence of what they characterized as war crimes by Russia's forces.

Russia's forces attacked civilian targets across Ukraine throughout the year. From April 21 to April 28, Russian forces attacked civilian targets with drones, artillery, and missiles, killing at least 34 and injuring at least 117 civilians. On April 30, Russia launched several waves of attacks throughout the country with drones, artillery, and missiles. Shelling of Pavlohrad, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, hit an industrial plant, 25 private houses, six schools, and five shops, killing two and injuring 40, including five children. Zhytomyr Oblast reported a drone hit one industrial facility. Russia also shelled Sumy Oblast and Ochakiv, Mykolayiv Oblast.

The OHCHR documented and verified allegations of unlawful killings, including summary executions, of civilians in more than 30 settlements in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy Oblasts committed while these territories were under the control of Russian armed forces in late February and March 2022, as well as arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearance.

Abductions: Russia's forces and proxies carried out widespread abductions of public officials, local authorities, human rights defenders, journalists, and individuals suspected of supporting the Ukrainian government in areas controlled by Russia. The majority of victims were active or former local public officials, human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists, and media workers. Ukraine's national police registered more than 29,000 missing persons reports since Russia launched its full-scale invasion. From the beginning of the full-fledged invasion to July, ZMINA recorded at least 562 cases of abduction of civilians by Russia's forces and proxies in the temporarily occupied territories; 16 abductees were found dead, and 311 citizens were not released, or their fate was unknown, while 235 returned home.

Russia's forces reportedly tortured and mistreated abductees to compel confessions or cooperation with occupation authorities. According to the OHCHR, Russia's forces and proxies used methods of torture or mistreatment such as punching and cutting detainees, putting sharp objects under fingernails, hitting with batons and rifle butts, strangling, waterboarding, electrocution, stress positions for long periods, exposure to cold temperatures or to a hot box, deprivation of water and food, and mock executions or threats.

On June 23, Russia's forces abducted Serhiy Potynh, an expert on labor safety at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and held him in a local police station where alleged dissidents were kept. Russia's forces regularly interrogated and tortured him, but no charges had been brought against him as of December.

In May, Russia's forces abducted journalist Iryna Levchenko and her husband Oleksandr in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast. According to relatives, Russia's forces abducted the couple off the street and first took them to the office they used for their "law enforcement units." The whereabouts of the detainees were unknown as of December.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: Russia's forces widely perpetrated rape and torture, as reported and documented by the OHCHR and other human rights organizations.

Observers noted Russia's forces and Russia-supported forces systematically denied access to independent observers, complicating the documentation of abuses in areas occupied by Russia. The International Committee of the Red Cross had visited hundreds of prisoners of war on both sides of the conflict and continued to demand access to all prisoners of war and civilian internees.

The Ukrainian Ombudsperson's Office reported that Russia's Kursk Remand Prison No. 1 (SIZO -1), headed by Aleksandr Baglay, was particularly notorious for systematic torture of Ukrainian POWs. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's office collected testimonies documenting conditions of

detention for prisoners of war in Kursk SIZO-1. According to the testimony of former prisoners, the institution operated as a torture chamber for Ukrainian prisoners, where detainees were deprived of rights and routinely subjected to torture, beatings, and forms of humiliation.

In Russia-occupied territory, conditions in detention centers were harsh and life threatening (see section 1.c.). Sexual violence was more prevalent in “unofficial” detention facilities, where in some cases women and men were not separated. The OHCHR reported that “different types of sexual violence were used as a form of torture to seek to obtain information or a confession, to punish, or to intimidate men and women in detention settings.” According to the OHCHR, Russian penitentiary staff used “electrocution and beatings to genitals, forced nudity, beatings or taserings after the shower, or threats of sexual violence against the victims or their loved ones.”

Reported forms of abuse included rape, threats of rape, threats of castration, intentional damage to genitalia, threats of sexual violence against family members, sexual harassment, forced nudity, coercion to watch sexual violence against family members, sex trafficking, and humiliation.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: There were reports Russia’s forces forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of civilians from Russia-occupied areas to Russia. According to the OHCHR, civilians seeking to escape the conflict felt compelled to evacuate in any direction possible, even if they did not want to enter Russia. Ukrainian children trapped in war zones faced death, injuries, separation from their families, and deportation to Russia. According to the Children of War platform, since the start of Russia’s invasion, 504 children were killed and 1,129 injured as of October 2.

Numerous credible international organizations, NGOs, and Ukrainian government agencies reported on Russia’s systematic forcible transfer and deportation of Ukraine’s children. Their estimates on the number of children involved ranged widely. According to Ombudsperson Dmytro Lubinets, approximately 20,000 Ukrainian children were forcibly deported as of October. The Ukrainian Ministry of Reintegration documented 19,546 Ukrainian children deported to Russia as of October 2. According to human rights organizations from the Ukraine 5 AM Coalition, Russian authorities deported as many as 260,000 to 700,000 Ukrainian children; it was unclear how many of these children were relocated with their legal guardians as part of Russia’s filtration efforts.

According to a report by Yale’s Conflict Observatory, Russia’s forces and their proxies forcibly transferred or deported more than 6,000 Ukrainian children, including children ranging from four months to 17 years of age, to Russia or within Russia-held territories, at times without or with coerced parental consent, where they were held in “summer camps.” According to the Yale Conflict Observatory report, at least 78 percent of the camps identified were engaged in systematic re-education exposing children from Ukraine to Russian academic, cultural, patriotic, or military education. The report stated that, “[m]ultiple camps endorsed by the Russian Federation were advertised as ‘integration programs,’ with the apparent goal of integrating children from Ukraine into the Russian government’s vision of national culture, history, and society.” Some of the children with unclear guardianship, particularly those living in orphanages or state institutions, were later transferred to Russian foster families for adoption.

Russian authorities relocated some Ukrainian minors, including those residing in Ukraine’s institutions prior to February 2022, for supposed medical care in occupied territories and the Russian Federation. According to the report, “The camps and other facilities holding children from Ukraine were part of a system centrally coordinated by officials of Russia’s federal government.”

In late 2022, Russian occupation authorities also began threatening to remove children from parents who refused to send them to local schools, whose curriculum was dictated by the Russian Ministry of Education, according to Ivan Fedorov, mayor-in-exile of occupied Melitopol. Ukraine’s Children’s Rights Commissioner Daria Herasymchuk reported that Russian officials removed children from parents who refused to cooperate with occupation authorities.

The Eastern Ukrainian Human Rights Group (EHRG) reported that beginning in March, Russian occupation forces increasingly integrated a new method of removing Ukrainian children, with “courts” stripping parents of custody rights for an inability to financially support their children. The

EHRG noted residents in occupied territory faced pervasive financial problems, as Russia blocked payments from Ukraine and Russian employers failed to pay local salaries; it also reported families whose children were taken away were not financially worse off than other families. The EHRG identified multiple cases in which “courts” removed children from the families of men forcibly mobilized into the Russian military, on the basis that these families could not provide for their children.

Russia did not allow sufficient access to international observers or organizations to locate or return children; when children were located, their relatives had to undertake costly and dangerous trips to Russia and endure harassment and interrogation by security forces to retrieve their children. As of October, the Ombudsperson’s Office reported only 387 deported children had returned from Russia.

In 2022, Russian President Putin signed a decree making it easier to adopt and obtain Russian citizenship for Ukrainian children without parental care, thus making it more difficult for surviving relatives to return these wrongfully adopted children to Ukraine. Russia also prepared a register of suitable Russian families for Ukrainian children and offered payment for each child who received citizenship, up to \$1,000 for those with disabilities.

Russia’s forces routinely bombed hospitals, resulting in civilian deaths. On February 24, a Russia-launched ballistic missile struck near a hospital in Vuhledar in the Ukrainian-controlled part of Donetsk, killing four civilians and wounding 10; six health-care workers were injured in the attack. Russia’s forces occupied medical facilities, evicting civilian patients and turning them into military hospitals, depriving the civilian population of medical care.

Human rights monitors reported that Russia’s forces continued to patrol towns and cities under their control, conduct identification checks, and look in residents’ houses and on personal mobile phones for pro-Ukrainian photographs, symbols, or posts on social networks.

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

In occupied areas, Russia’s forces suppressed freedom of expression, including for members of the press, through harassment, intimidation, abductions, and physical assaults on journalists and media outlets. They also prevented the transmission of Ukrainian and independent television and radio programming in areas under their occupation.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territories.

Freedom of Expression: The HRMMU noted occupation authorities placed “excessive limitations on the freedoms of opinion and expression.” In 2022, Russia’s parliament passed a law imposing a prison term of up to 15 years for spreading intentionally “fake” news regarding Russia’s military. Occupation authorities also applied a new administrative article outlawing “public actions aimed at discrediting the Russian army” to prosecute those expressing dissent with actions taken by Crimean occupation authorities.

In 2020, occupation authorities began enforcing a law that prohibited the unauthorized dissemination of information damaging to the FSB’s reputation without the organization’s approval. Enforcement of this law in Crimea further deprived residents of the ability to exercise freedom of

expression, by preventing them from publicly criticizing and disseminating information concerning reportedly unlawful actions of FSB officers and alleged violations or abuses of human rights.

Individuals could not publicly criticize Russia's occupation without fear of reprisal. Human rights groups reported the FSB engaged in widespread surveillance of social media, telephones, and electronic communication and routinely summoned individuals for "discussions" for speaking or posting opposition to the occupation. These unlawfully obtained recordings were often used against those who were unjustly detained in closed trials.

Occupation authorities often deemed expressions of dissent "extremism" and prosecuted individuals for them. On July 6, representatives of the "Center for Countering Extremism" in Crimea cited Abdureshit Dzhepparov for a post on a social media network that allegedly "discredited the armed forces of the Russian Federation." The Simferopol District "court" fined him 45,000 rubles (\$470).

On February 16, Russia's occupying authorities searched the house of Halyna Balaban, a former activist of the Ukrainian Culture Center, allegedly for a post on a social network in 2018. Occupation authorities issued a citation and moved Balaban to the district "court" of Simferopol, which fined her 2,000 Russian rubles (\$20) and confiscated her mobile phone.

Occupation authorities continued to ban the display of Ukrainian or Crimean Tatar symbols as "extremist." Human rights groups claimed violations of this law were rare during the year because fewer residents displayed such symbols than in previous years, reportedly to avoid prosecution. Occupation authorities deemed expressions of support for Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea to be equivalent to undermining Russia's territorial integrity. There were multiple reports that occupation authorities detained and prosecuted individuals seeking to film raids on homes or court proceedings.

Violence and Harassment: The Institute of Mass Information (IMI) reported that Russia's forces committed 536 crimes against journalists and media in Ukraine from the beginning of the full-scale invasion through September 24. As of October 24, Russia's military killed 66 journalists in Ukraine, 10 of whom were killed while performing their professional duties. Another 24 journalists were injured.

There were numerous cases of Russia's security forces harassing activists and detaining journalists in connection with their civic or professional activities. On July 27, Russia's occupation authorities detained citizen journalists Luftiye Zudiyeva and Kulamet Ibrayimov near the building of the Simferopol supreme court, where they were reporting on the trial of detained Crimean Tatars. The journalists were not allowed to enter the court building and were later detained with 12 men who came to support their relatives. Russia's authorities fined Zudiyeva 12,000 Russian rubles (\$125) and arrested Ibrayimov for five days.

Russia's missile attack on Kherson on April 26 killed the Ukrainian producer of Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, Bohdan Bitik, and injured the newspaper's correspondent, Corrado Zunino.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, journalists resorted to self-censorship to continue reporting and broadcasting. In partially occupied oblasts, Russian television and internet monopolized the communication space.

There were reports occupation authorities sought to restrict access to or remove internet content concerning Crimea they disliked. As of August, occupation authorities had blocked 1,600 internet resources as "those containing extremist information" in Crimea, including the websites of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Ministry of Integration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, leading human rights NGOs, and major independent Ukrainian news outlets, among others. On May 6, Russia's authorities declared the activities of the Crimean Human Rights Group "undesirable" and determined that it "posed a threat to the

Constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation.” Censorship of independent internet sites was widespread.

Occupation authorities banned most Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar-language broadcasts, replacing the content with programming from Russia.

According to the IMI, Russia’s occupying authorities shut down all pro-Ukrainian media in occupied territories and founded their own newspapers and television channels.

According to the Opora NGO, Russian authorities blocked 979 online resources in Russia and occupied territories, including Ukrainian language media, official websites of the Ukrainian authorities, and web resources of public Ukrainian organizations, human rights groups, and volunteer initiatives.

The IMI reported the media landscape of Zaporizhzhia Oblast changed radically beginning with Russia’s full-scale invasion. Since Russia’s forces controlled most of the oblast’s key cities, many media outlets were forced to close. According to the IMI, there were no newspapers left in Melitopol, Berdyansk, Polohy, Tokmak, and Enerhodar (all in Zaporizhzhia Oblast). Many online media stopped operating. Pro-Ukrainian television channels in occupied areas also stopped broadcasting. Instead, Russia’s propaganda television channels broadcast in occupied areas.

National Security: Occupation authorities cited laws protecting national security to justify retaliation against opponents of Russia’s occupation.

The Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service included prominent critics of the occupation on its list of extremists and terrorists. Inclusion on the list prevented individuals from holding bank accounts, using notary services, and conducting other financial transactions.

Occupation authorities frequently cited “extremism,” “terrorism,” or other purported national security grounds to justify harassment or prosecution of individuals in retaliation for expressing opposition to the occupation. For example, on June 6, a military court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Crimean artist Bohdan Ziza to 15 years in a penal colony. Law enforcement officers detained him in 2022 after he splashed the entrance of a building in Yevpatoriya (a structure that previously housed the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people) with yellow and blue paint. Authorities first charged him with intentional destruction or damage of property but later added vandalism and terrorism. Russia’s occupation authorities included him in a “list of terrorists and extremists.” According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, investigators used illegal methods of investigation, namely pressure, intimidation, threats, and obstruction of the defense lawyer’s work.

Internet Freedom

Russia’s occupation forces reportedly restricted or disrupted access to Ukrainian mobile operators and internet in almost all the occupied areas. Residents were blocked from accessing widely used social media platforms and messaging applications, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Viber. Human rights groups and journalists who were critical of Russia’s aggressive actions reported their websites were subjected to malicious cyber activities, such as coordinated denial of service incidents and unauthorized attempts to obtain information from computers as well as coordinated campaigns of trolling and harassment on social media. Russia’s occupation authorities restricted free expression on the internet (see section 2.a. of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia) by imposing repressive Russian Federation laws on occupied territories. Security services routinely monitored and controlled internet activity to suppress dissenting opinions. According to media accounts, occupation authorities interrogated and harassed residents of Russia-occupied territories for online postings, including those that demonstrated pro-Ukrainian views, opposition to Russia’s occupation and the actions of occupation authorities, and support for groups occupation authorities deemed “extremist.”

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In Russia-occupied territory, occupation authorities commonly prevented individuals from openly participating in peaceful assemblies, especially those protesting the occupation.

Russia-led forces in the occupied areas continued to implement “laws” requiring all religious organizations except the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to undergo “state religious expert evaluations” and reregister with them. According to the HRMMU, most religious groups recognized under Ukrainian law were unable to reregister because of stringent legal requirements under “laws” in the occupied territories that mirrored Russia’s legislation preventing or discouraging reregistration of many religious communities. On December 7, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church reported a December 2022 “order” issued by occupied Zaporizhzhia “governor” Yevhen Balitskyy, which banned the operation of the church, alleging it had stored “explosives and firearms on the territory of religious buildings and auxiliary premises” and citing “the participation of parishioners in mass riots and anti-Russian rallies in March-April 2022,” “distribution of literature inciting violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation,” and “active participation” of church members in the “activities of extremist organizations and propaganda of neo-Nazi ideas.”

According to the April report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the “very restrictive attitude of Russian occupying authorities in Crimea towards policing Crimean Tatar assemblies veered towards even tighter control. Sanctions such as short-term arrests and fines were meted out against Crimean Tatars, often on the spot and without any prior warning.” The exercise of Crimean Tatars’ freedom of peaceful assembly was reportedly negatively impacted by an atmosphere of surveillance and harassment.

In particular, freedom of peaceful assembly was undermined by the blanket requirement of prior authorization by the occupation authorities for any assembly.

Human rights monitors reported that occupation authorities routinely denied permission to hold assemblies based on political beliefs, notably to opponents of the occupation or those seeking to protest the actions of the occupation authorities. Those who gathered without permission were regularly charged with administrative offenses. Expansive rules regarding types of gatherings that required permits and selective enforcement of the rules made it difficult for protesters to avoid such offenses. On August 25, Russian security forces detained 23 Crimean Tatars, including civil society activists, journalists, and elderly persons, for gathering in front of a court building in Simferopol to express solidarity with friends and relatives on trial.

Occupation authorities brought charges for “unauthorized assemblies” against single-person protests, even though preauthorization was not required for individual protests.

There were reports authorities used a ban on “unauthorized missionary activity” to restrict public gatherings of members of religious minority groups.

On June 25, Russian occupation authorities detained two men for allegedly conducting an unauthorized rally in Bilohirsk and having Crimean Tatar flags mounted on their vehicles. The district “court” found Rustem Kurnosov and Enver Useinov guilty of committing an administrative offense and imposed fines of 20,000 Russian rubles (\$200) for “organizing or holding an unauthorized public event.”

There were reports occupation authorities charged and fined individuals for allegedly violating public assembly rules in retaliation against those who gathered to witness security force raids on homes.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied Crimea.

Freedom of Association

According to the HRMMU, Russia's and Russia-led forces did not permit domestic and international civil society organizations, including human rights defenders, to operate freely in occupied areas. Residents informed the HRMMU they were being prosecuted (or feared being prosecuted) by the "ministry of state security" for their pro-Ukrainian views or previous affiliation with Ukrainian NGOs. If human rights groups attempted to work in those areas, they faced significant harassment and intimidation. The HRMMU also noted some Russia-led civil society organizations appeared to require certain persons, such as public-sector employees, to join.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied Crimea. See also section 7.a.

Occupation authorities broadly restricted the exercise of freedom of association for individuals who opposed the occupation. For example, there were numerous reports of authorities taking steps to harass, intimidate, arrest, and imprison members of Crimean Solidarity, an unregistered movement of friends and family of victims of repression by occupation authorities that opposed Russia's occupation of Crimea. The Crimean Human Rights Group documented multiple cases in which police visited the homes of Crimean Solidarity activists to threaten them or warn them not to engage in "extremist" activities. In March, occupation authorities distributed letters warning against participating in "unauthorized mass" gatherings, as they might constitute "extremist" activities. At least seven Crimean Tatar activists and journalists received such "preventive warnings."

According to human rights groups, Russia's security services routinely monitored prayers at mosques for any mention that Crimea remained part of Ukraine. Russia's security forces also monitored mosques for anti-Russia sentiment and as a means of recruiting police informants, whose secret testimony was used in trials of alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members.

All congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses were banned as an "extremist organization." On February 27, the Yalta city "court" found Jehovah's Witnesses Taras Kuzyo, Serhiy Lyulin, Petro Zhylytsov, and Darya Kuzyo guilty of financing and participating in an "extremist organization." The "court" sentenced Taras Kuzyo to six and one-half years in prison, Serhiy Lyulin and Petro Zhylytsov to six years and one month in prison, and issued Darya Kuzyo a three-year suspended sentence. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people remained banned for purported "extremism" despite a decision by the International Court of Justice holding that occupation authorities had to "refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis." Following the 2016 ban on the Crimean Tatar Mejlis as an "extremist organization," occupation authorities banned gatherings by Mejlis members and prosecuted individuals for discussing the Mejlis on social media.

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Occupation authorities restricted freedom of movement.

In-country Movement: Occupation authorities maintained a state "border" at the administrative boundary between mainland Ukraine and occupied Crimea and the other four purportedly annexed territories. According to the HRMMU, the administrative boundary and the absence of public transportation between Crimea and occupied mainland Ukraine continued to undermine freedom of movement to and from the peninsula, affecting mainly the elderly and individuals with limited mobility. Children younger than 16 were allowed to cross the administrative boundary between

occupied mainland Ukraine and Crimea both ways if accompanied by one parent. Children ages 14-16 could cross the administrative line both ways unaccompanied if they studied at an educational institution located in mainland Ukraine and resided or were registered in Crimea.

There were reports occupation authorities selectively detained and at times abused persons attempting to enter or leave Crimea. According to human rights groups, occupation authorities routinely detained adult men at the administrative boundary for additional questioning, threatened to seize their passports and documents, seized their telephones and memory cards, and questioned them for hours. There were reports that Crimean Tatars were targeted for conscription. The HRMMU documented “many cases of men and women who were arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared by the Russian occupation authorities while trying to cross the administrative boundary line between mainland Ukraine and Crimea.”

Traveling from the occupied areas into Ukrainian-controlled territory was cumbersome and dangerous. As of January, the sole entry point to cross directly from the occupied areas into Ukraine was closed. Civilians wishing to travel from the occupied parts of Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk Oblasts to the territory of Ukraine under government control could do so only through the Russian Federation. The trip was very expensive and dangerous since it involved going through a “filtration” process, a system of security checks and personal data collection, during which many individuals were arbitrarily detained.

UNHCR reported that between January and June, nearly 100 incidents of restricted movement on humanitarian operations were documented in occupied areas, hindering assistance delivery. At least five humanitarian workers were killed in the line of duty in Ukraine in the first six months of the year. Denials of access, including to the left bank after the June Kakhovka Dam disaster, severely hampered the provision of humanitarian aid to Russian-occupied areas.

Citizenship: Russia’s occupation authorities required all residents of occupied areas to accept Russian passports and offered them incentives to move to Russia. On April 27, Russian President Putin signed a decree stating that persons residing in the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk Oblasts would retroactively be considered “foreigners or stateless persons” as of September 30 and could be subject to deportation unless they obtained Russian citizenship.

In 2022, Russian President Putin signed a decree fast-tracking Russian citizenship to all citizens of Ukraine, not just those in purportedly annexed territories. Residents of Crimea who chose not to accept Russian passports were considered foreigners, but in some cases could obtain a residency permit. Persons without Russian passports holding a residency permit were deprived of key rights and could not own agricultural land, vote or run for office, register a religious congregation, or register a vehicle. Occupation authorities denied those who refused Russian passports access to “government” employment, education, and health care as well as the ability to open bank accounts and buy insurance, among other limitations.

According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, Russian authorities prosecuted private employers who continued to employ Ukrainians. Fines could be imposed on employers for every recorded case of employing a Ukrainian citizen without a labor license. Fines in such cases amounted to several million dollars.

In some cases, authorities compelled Crimean residents to surrender their Ukrainian passports, complicating international travel, because many countries did not recognize “passports” issued by Russian occupation authorities.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

Not applicable.

F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

Approximately 60,000 residents of Crimea were registered as IDPs by the Ukrainian government on the mainland, according to the Ministry of Social Policy. The Mejlis and local NGOs, such as Crimea SOS, believed the actual number could be as high as 100,000, as most IDPs were unregistered.

Section 3.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: The Russian Federation organized sham elections from August 31 to September 10 in occupied portions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. The OHCHR reported receiving consistent allegations that Russia's forces and their proxies exerted force to compel participation in the process. In a September report, the HMMR noted that any attempt to hold "elections" with the backing of forces that held illegitimate control in these occupied territories undermined international humanitarian law and international human rights law, rendering the results legally invalid. Before holding "elections," the occupying authorities engaged in propaganda and reportedly bribed voters through "humanitarian aid" from the local and federal budgets.

Candidates were selected through an opaque process reportedly orchestrated by political curators dispatched from Russia and ranged from former Ukrainian politicians (including members of the pro-Russian Party of Regions, which Ukraine banned on February 21), to taxi drivers, security guards, and bodyguards. All candidates had to undergo a polygraph test administered by the FSB to prove they were loyal to Russia. According to Eastern Human Rights Group, local councils were stripped of any real power and local political parties were banned; only branches of Russian political parties could take part in elections. Russian authorities reported high turnout in the occupied territories, where hundreds of thousands of individuals supposedly voted in the "elections." No independent observers verified any of the activities associated with the "elections."

There were numerous reports that the occupying authorities set up "mobile voting points," including ballot boxes in city squares, village centers, cars, and other irregular locations. In Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, observers reported local collaborators and Russian soldiers walked door to door carrying assault rifles and ballot boxes, making individuals vote.

Russia's occupation authorities had prevented Crimean residents from voting in Ukrainian national and local elections since Crimea's occupation began in 2014. Russia's occupation authorities permitted Crimean residents to vote in the September 2021 Russia State Duma elections. Occupation authorities claimed a voter turnout rate of 49.75 percent. Independent observers and elections experts alleged massive electoral fraud, including coerced voting by state employees and ballot stuffing, among other irregularities.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

Corruption: There were some reports of systemic corruption among Russia’s appointed proxy “office holders” in occupied areas, including through embezzlement of Russian state funds allocated to support the occupation. On January 30, the Feodosiya “court” placed former mayor Andrey Lebedev under arrest for two months under suspicion of abuse of power. Other “officials” were reportedly being investigated by Russian security forces for the illegal land transfers, which they said they had undertaken on the verbal instruction of Mikhail Nazarov, appointed deputy chairperson of the Russian “government” of Crimea. The investigation continued at the end of the year.

Section 5.

Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Russia-led forces and proxies in Russia-occupied areas routinely denied access to domestic and international civil society organizations. Human rights groups attempting to work in those areas faced significant harassment and intimidation (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association). Most independent human rights organizations ceased activities in Crimea following Russia’s occupation in 2014. Occupation authorities refused to cooperate with independent human rights NGOs, ignored their views, and harassed human rights monitors and threatened them with fines and imprisonment.

Russia continued to deny access to the Crimean Peninsula to international human rights monitors from the OSCE and the United Nations. There were no independent NGOs working in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: The NGO ZMINA reported the Russian army and FSB consistently persecuted human rights defenders and journalists, including by fabricating charges of terrorism, extremism, espionage, sabotage, or subversion against them. ZMINA provided assistance to 10 human rights activists who had been held in captivity for periods ranging from 11 to 18 months. Many of the human rights activists and journalists reported being tortured while in detention.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: Russia denied UN representatives, international human rights monitors from the OSCE, and ICRC representatives access to occupied territory.

Section 6.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: The Eastern Ukrainian Human Rights Group reported an 84 percent increase in rapes reported in Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts compared to levels prior to Russia’s full-scale invasion, with 219 cases registered in occupied areas. Journalists accessing online data from Russian military courts found that in 2022, Sevastopol, and Crimea writ large, led in the number of rape cases involving Russian military men. According to local activists and lawyers, the military often acted to silence cases through threats or bribery. Furthermore, they assessed that many women did not report rapes. In its March 15 report, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine documented cases of sexual and gender-based violence committed by Russian authorities in nine provinces of Ukraine. Domestic violence

remained a serious problem in occupied Crimea; however, occupation authorities' restrictions on human rights organizations made it difficult to assess its prevalence. There was no information available on rape or domestic violence in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

Discrimination: This information was not available due to the restriction of independent NGOs working in the Russia-occupied areas.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of occupation authorities.

Women in Crimea accessed reproductive health care through services funded by the Russian occupation authorities, private insurance, and NGO programs. No Ukrainian or international monitors had access to Crimea or other occupied Russian areas, making it difficult to assess the state of reproductive health care there, including whether, and what kind of services were provided by occupation authorities for survivors of sexual violence. Residents reported they were told they would be denied medical care if they did not obtain Russian passports. One woman reported she was told she would have to give birth "at home or on the street," but would not have access to a hospital unless she applied for a passport.

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

Since the beginning of the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, Russian authorities singled out Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians for discrimination, abuse, deprivation of civil liberties and religious and economic rights, and violence, including killings and abductions. The August 2021 UN secretary-general's report noted, "[t]he activities of the Mejlis remained prohibited in Crimea."

There were reports Russian occupation authorities openly advocated for discrimination against Crimean Tatars. Occupation authorities harassed Crimean Tatars for speaking their language in public and forbade speaking it in the workplace, and teachers reportedly prohibited it in schools. Crimean Tatars were prohibited from celebrating their national holidays and commemorating victims of previous abuses.

Occupation authorities prohibited the use of Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian flags and symbols. In early September, occupying authorities banned the flying of Crimean Tatar flags during the celebration of the start of the new academic year.

Russian occupation authorities prohibited Crimean Tatars affiliated with the Mejlis from registering businesses or properties as a matter of policy.

Ethnic Ukrainians also faced discrimination by occupation authorities. Ukrainian as a language of instruction was removed from educational institutions in occupied areas. In 2017, the International Court of Justice ruled on provisional measures in proceedings brought by Ukraine against the Russian Federation, concluding unanimously that the Russian Federation had to "ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language."

Occupation authorities did not permit churches linked to ethnic Ukrainians, in particular the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, to register under Russian law. Occupation authorities harassed and intimidated members of these churches and used court proceedings to force the OCU to leave properties it had rented for years.

The largest OCU congregation in Crimea closed in 2019 following a ruling by occupation authorities that its cathedral located in Simferopol had to be "returned to the state." The church was shut down after repeated refusals by authorities to allow it to register.

CHILDREN

Birth Registration: Under both Ukrainian law and laws imposed by Russian occupation authorities, either birthplace or parentage determined citizenship. Russia's occupation complicated the question of citizenship for children born in occupied territory as it made it more difficult for parents to register a child as a citizen with Ukrainian authorities. Registration in the country required a hospital certificate, which was retained when a birth certificate was issued. In occupied areas, new parents could obtain only a Russian birth certificate and did not have access to a hospital certificate. The Ukrainian government instituted a process whereby births in Russia-occupied areas could be recognized with documents issued by occupation authorities.

Education: Occupation authorities imposed Russian as the instructional language in educational institutions of all levels. They forced Ukrainian citizens to enroll their children in schools and preschool facilities that followed the Russian curriculum. Children were taught by teachers and educators from the Russian Federation. If parents did not agree, the occupation administration threatened to remove children from families and place them in boarding schools, where they could be wrongfully adopted by Russian citizens. The occupation administration imposed a curriculum that included a "patriotic education program" and initial military training for schoolchildren.

Child Abuse: Russia had no law on child abuse, and occupation authorities' restrictions on human rights organizations made it difficult to assess its prevalence.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

According to a June statement by Vladimir Terentyev of the "Main Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol," there were approximately 600 crimes against children investigated in 2022, resulting in 295 cases sent to court. Terentyev noted that 23 of the children died, four of them from "criminal attacks." In the case of one of the deaths deemed to have been caused by negligence, a woman was sentenced to 1.5 years in prison for failing to obtain proper medical care (her baby died during a home birth), and her doula was under investigation.

There were cases of prosecutions of adults for child rape. In one case, a resident of Razdolnensky District, Crimea, was sentenced in October to 16 years for raping his stepdaughter, age 11, repeatedly over the course of six months. He threatened to kill her if she appealed to law enforcement.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: In one case involving child pornography, a man was sentenced in December under several charges, per the "prosecutor's office" in Crimea (the precise charges were not detailed). He received seven years in prison followed by 1.5 years of restricted freedom. The man had sent pornographic materials to more than 10 children via the internet and messenger services and demanded intimate photographs from them in return.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

ANTISEMITISM

According to Jewish groups, the Jewish population in Crimea was approximately 10,000 to 15,000, with most living in Simferopol. According to the Jewish association, there were approximately 30,000 Jewish persons living in the Donbas. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents; however, Russia's occupation authorities' restrictions on human rights groups limited their ability to properly monitor antisemitic acts.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Criminalization: See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

Violence and Harassment: The UN Human Rights Council's independent expert received reports of increased violence and discrimination against members of the LGBTQI+ community in Crimea as well as the use of homophobic propaganda employed by the occupation authorities. LGBTQI+ persons reportedly were frequently subjected to beatings in public spaces and entrapped by organized groups through social networks. The council's report noted, "[t]his environment created an atmosphere of fear and terror for members of the community, with related adverse impacts on their mental health and well-being." According to the NGO Nash Svit, in April, a Russian military patrol assaulted a gay man in Donetsk. The military did not like his appearance and voice, beat the man, and took his smart phone.

Discrimination: Russia's forces and Russia-led forces in occupied areas systematically failed to respect the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons. Human rights groups and LGBTQI+ activists reported that most LGBTQI+ individuals fled Crimea and Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts after Russia's occupation began. Those who remained lived in fear of abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

There was insufficient access to information on the treatment of members of the LGBTQI+ community in occupied eastern Ukraine.

According to the HRMMU, NGOs working on access to health care among vulnerable groups found it impossible to advocate for LGBTQI+ persons due to fear of retaliation by occupation authorities.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: There was insufficient access to information on the availability of legal gender recognition within Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: There was insufficient access to information on coercive medical or psychological practices within Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: In 2022, President Putin signed legislation that widely banned public expression of LGBTQI+ identity in Russia. The law made it illegal to spread "propaganda" regarding "nontraditional sexual relations" in the media, advertising, film, or on social media. Demonstrations of "nontraditional relationships or preferences" were also barred from advertising, and from any outlet visible to children. Distributing to children any information "that causes children to want to change their sex" was also prohibited. As Russia deemed occupied areas of Ukraine to be part of its sovereign territory, the law was likely to be enforced in Crimea, and Russia-occupied parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

Occupation authorities prohibited any LGBTQI+ group from holding public events in Crimea, and, although there were no reports available, occupation authorities may have enforced similar policies in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

See section 6 of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities in Russia-occupied Crimea and occupied areas in eastern Ukraine faced a lack of appropriate care and education. The UN Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) reported that persons with disabilities trapped in Russia-occupied areas in Ukraine were used as “human shields” by Russia’s armed forces. The UNCRPD was also gravely concerned that persons with disabilities were reportedly trapped in the conflict zones and that the evacuation of the institutions in conflict areas was not prioritized.

According to reporting, the UNCRPD also urged Ukraine and the Russian Federation to immediately evacuate persons with disabilities who remained in residential institutions on territory under their respective control, and to ensure the evacuation process was monitored by independent parties. The United Nations reported the UNCRPD was further concerned regarding reports that persons with disabilities who remained in residential institutions were at severe risk, as their access to basic resources, such as food, an adequate standard of living, and heating in the winter months, were jeopardized.

Section 7.

Worker Rights

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Occupation authorities in Crimea applied the labor laws of the Russian Federation. It was expected that Russia’s labor laws would be applied in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts after their purported annexation (see the *Country Report on Human Rights Practices* for Russia).

Occupation authorities imposed the labor laws and regulations of the Russian Federation on Crimean workers, limited worker rights, and created barriers to the exercise of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the ability to strike. Trade unions were formally protected under Russia’s laws but limited in practice. Employers were often able to engage in antiunion discrimination and violate collective bargaining rights. Occupation authorities threatened to nationalize property owned by Ukrainian labor unions in Crimea. Ukrainians who did not accept Russian passports faced job discrimination in all sectors of the economy. Only holders of Russian national identification cards were allowed to work in “government” and municipal positions. Labor activists believed unions were threatened in Crimea to accept “government” policy without question and faced considerable restrictions on advocating for their members.

The International Labor Organization received reports that those who remained working in the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant were forced to sign employment contracts with the Russian state atomic energy corporation, Rosatom, while still working under Ukrainian license, and to join unions created or controlled by the occupying forces, while the Ukrainian national operator, Energoatom, urged them not to do so.

According to the Nuclear Power and Industry Workers Union of Ukraine, some workers were forced to go to work and escorted to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant at gunpoint. Energoatom reported two workers were beaten to death and that 10 workers abducted by the occupying forces were missing. In February, Vostok SOS monitors recorded four cases of forced labor of civilians in the occupied territories. All of them took place in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast. In Dniprorudne,

Zaporizhzhia Oblast Russia's forces created a system of forced labor for those without a permanent residence.

Multiple sources reported cases of civilians forced to work on the front lines for the Russian military. In July, the Associated Press reported hundreds of civilians were forced to dig trenches and other fortifications on the front lines in Zaporizhzhia, as well as cases of civilians being forced to dig graves in occupied territory.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons*

Report at: <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

Child labor in amber and coal mining remained a problem in Crimea. No information was available at year's end regarding labor practices in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights for Russia* for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory. Due to a lack of available information, it was not possible to determine the degree to which the government effectively enforced these laws. Anecdotal evidence suggested enforcement was poor.