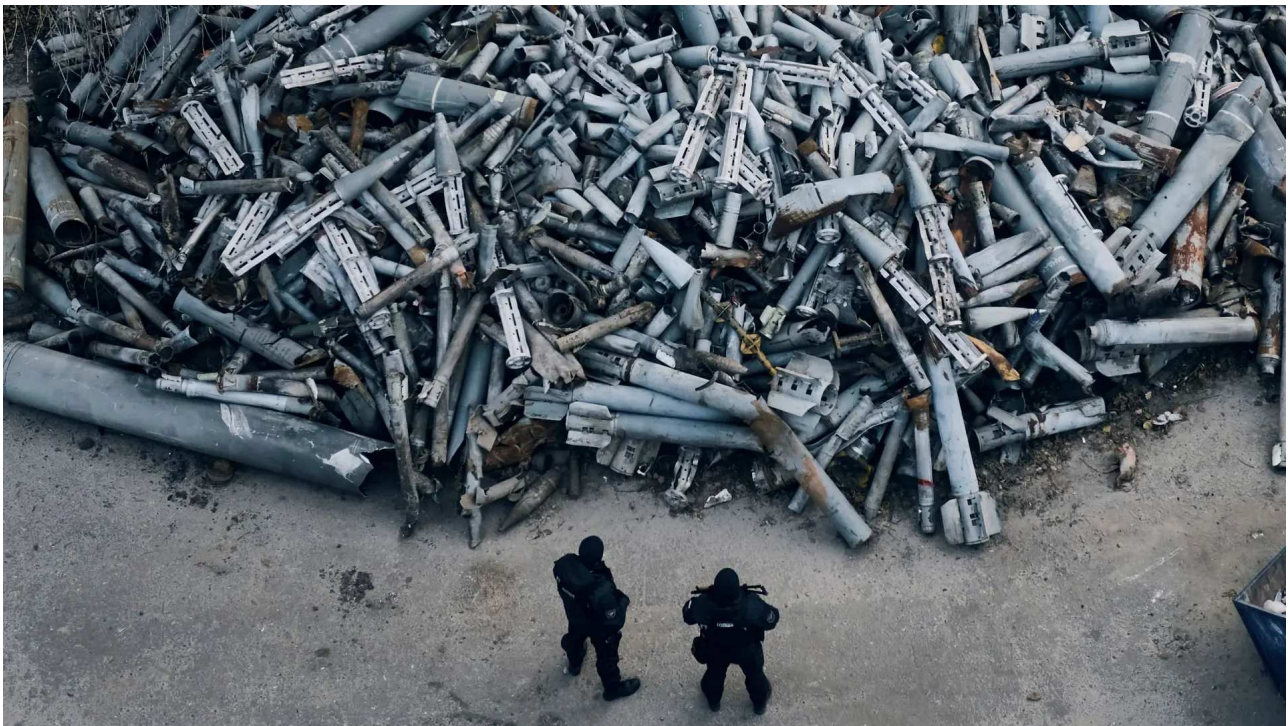


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World Report 2024



The human rights impacts of Russia's war on Ukraine continued to eclipse all other rights issues in Ukraine. As of [September](#), at least 9,614 civilians had been killed and more than 17,535 injured since Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022. [Millions](#) more had to flee abroad or were internally displaced.

Throughout the year, Russian forces committed war crimes and other atrocities in Ukraine. They [carried](#) out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks that killed and severely injured civilians and destroyed vital infrastructure and objects of cultural and historical significance. Russian forces' widespread use of torture and their continued [attacks](#) on energy-related infrastructure may amount to crimes against humanity, according to a [United Nations investigative body](#). The June destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station in Khersonska region, [reportedly](#) by Russian forces, devastated livelihoods and caused [lasting](#) environmental damage. Russian forces repeatedly shelled vital ports and grain facilities in Ukraine, with serious implications for Ukrainians and millions facing hunger worldwide.

In March, International Criminal Court (ICC) judges issued arrest [warrants](#) for Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Russia's children's rights commissioner for unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia.

Russian forces used both cluster munitions and banned antipersonnel landmines. Ukrainian forces also used cluster munitions, and there is significant evidence they used antipersonnel landmines in 2022, which the authorities pledged to investigate. Ukraine remained one of the world's most mine-contaminated countries, with approximately [174,000 square kilometers contaminated](#) by landmines and explosive remnants of war that may take decades to clear.

Ukraine continued to advance European Union candidacy-related [reforms](#). The government took positive steps toward eliminating certain forms of corruption. Judicial reform advanced, but the outcome of Constitutional Court reform was mixed. Continued institutionalization of children, particularly children with disabilities, remained a concern. The 2022 law on collaboration and its enforcement continued to draw criticism from Ukrainian civil society and international actors alike.

Indiscriminate Attacks

Russian forces continued to carry out attacks using explosive weapons in populated areas, heightening risks for civilians. The attacks impacted civilian infrastructure, including residential buildings, hospitals, and schools. Russia's [attacks](#) on [energy-related](#) infrastructure caused electricity blackouts and obstructed access to health, education, and other essential services for millions, including [people](#) with disabilities.

Throughout the year, Ukrainian forces also carried out some “likely indiscriminate attacks and two incidents that qualify as war crimes,” the UN Commission of Inquiry (UN CoI) stated in its March report.

A January Russian attack on a residential building in Dnipro [destroyed](#) 236 apartments, [killed](#) 45 civilians, including 6 children, and injured at least 80.

A June Russian [missile](#) attack on a popular pizza restaurant in Kramatorsk killed 13, including well-known writer Victoria Amelina, and wounded 61. Also in June, a Russian airstrike hit a five-story residential building in Kryvyi Rih, killing 12 people and wounding 36.

Throughout the year, [Russian](#) forces [repeatedly](#) attacked [Odesa](#) with missiles and drones, killing and injuring civilians and damaging and destroying grain terminals, historical buildings, and culturally significant monuments. A July attack in Lviv with a guided [missile struck](#) a residential apartment complex, killing 10 civilians and injuring 48. Although Ukrainian military targets were in the vicinity, Human Rights Watch said Russian forces' use of a guided munition with a large, high-explosive warhead on an apartment complex in a residential area should be investigated as a war crime.

Russian forces continued regular [artillery](#) bombardments of Kherson city and its environs after retreating to the left bank of Dnipro River following the November 2022 de-occupation of Kherson.

In October, a missile strike on the village of Hroza, in Kharkivska region, killed 59 civilians attending a soldier's funeral. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) [investigated](#) the strike, characterizing it as the single deadliest incident for civilians since February 2022, and found no indication of legitimate military targets in the vicinity at the time of the attack. The HRMMU concluded that the strike was likely launched by Russian armed forces, who either failed to do everything feasible to verify that the target was a military objective or deliberately targeted civilians or civilian objects.

The World Health [Organization](#) verified more than 1,000 attacks on healthcare workers, vehicles, and facilities since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the highest number recorded in any humanitarian emergency. In [August](#), five healthcare workers were injured and one killed during Russia's attack on a hospital in Kherson.

Landmines and Cluster Munitions

Since February 2022, Russian forces extensively used at least [13 types of antipersonnel mines](#) in multiple areas, heavily [mining](#) its front lines in anticipation of Ukraine's ongoing counteroffensive. This has resulted in an unprecedented situation in which a country that is not party to the Mine Ban Treaty is using the weapon on the territory of a state party to that treaty.

In January, the Ukrainian [government committed to “duly study”](#) a Human Rights Watch report about Ukrainian forces' [use](#) of rocket-delivered PFM-series antipersonnel mines in attacks on and around Iziium in 2022, when it was under Russian control. At a [June](#) meeting of the Mine Ban Treaty, to which Ukraine is a state party, Ukraine reaffirmed this commitment.

In addition, both Russian and Ukrainian forces have used at least 13 types of anti-vehicle mines, also called anti-tank mines.

Russian [forces continued](#) to extensively use cluster munitions, which have killed and injured hundreds of civilians and contaminated large areas of Ukraine. A July cluster munition attack on a residential district in Lyman, Donetsk region, killed nine civilians and [injured](#) a dozen more.

Ukrainian forces also continued to [use](#) cluster munitions, resulting in an unknown number of civilian casualties. Ukraine has used cluster munitions from its existing stockpiles and received cluster munitions from the United States in July and September. Neither Russia nor Ukraine is a party to the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Abuses under Russian Occupation

Throughout the year, Russian and Russian-affiliated forces committed numerous grave abuses against civilians in occupied parts of Zaporizka, Khersonska, Donetsk, and Luhanska regions. They carried out enforced disappearances, summary executions of civilians, and unlawful detention and torture, especially targeting civil servants, pro-Ukraine activists and journalists, and other civilians presumed to oppose the occupation.

They also perpetrated sexual violence, forced transfers of Ukrainian adults and children, and looting of cultural artifacts.

Evidence of Russia's apparent war crimes in now de-occupied Khersonska and Kharkivska regions continued to surface, including of [torture centers](#) that Russian forces operated in Kherson during their eight-month occupation. In September, the UN CoI [reported](#) that Russian soldiers raped and committed sexual violence against women there ranging in age from 19 to 83.

In June, an explosion presumably caused by Russian forces destroyed the Kakhovka dam, flooding dozens of towns and villages on both sides of Dnipro River. Russian authorities [restricted access](#) to cities and villages on the Russian-occupied left bank, preventing volunteers from delivering desperately needed humanitarian aid, and did not carry out timely evacuations. [At least 50](#) people reportedly died in the aftermath, [41 of them](#) in Russian-occupied areas. Twenty-four [hazardous](#) industrial facilities, sewage treatment facilities, cemeteries, and landfills were flooded, contaminating the surface and groundwater and exposing the local population to communicable diseases.

Russian authorities continued their systematic efforts to [coerce](#) residents of occupied areas to accept Russian citizenship. A March law expedited the application process. Those who did not accept Russian passports faced threats and restricted access to employment, medical care, and social benefits.

In September, Russia held local elections in occupied parts of Ukraine, in violation of international law.

Russian authorities in occupied areas continued to try to erase Ukrainian culture and language, including by imposing the Russian curriculum and language of instruction, war propaganda, and military training in schools, in violation of international law. They used detention, torture, and ill-treatment to coerce local educators to cooperate, including to hand over school data. They threatened parents whose children study online in the Ukrainian school system with fines, detention, and deprivation of child custody.

Torture and Ill-Treatment of Prisoners of War

Russian forces committed war crimes against Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs). A March report by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine ([UN Monitoring Mission](#)) found that in 32 of 48 detention facilities in Russia and Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, POWs faced torture and ill-treatment, forced labor, and abhorrent detention conditions. Many were held incommunicado.

Russian authorities committed apparent war crimes by criminally prosecuting Ukrainian POWs, including members of the Ukrainian “[Azov](#)” brigade, for participating in hostilities; using torture to extract confessions; and denying fair trials. In March, a court in a Russian-occupied area sentenced POW [Maxym Butkevych](#), a prominent rights defender, to 13 years’ [imprisonment](#) on bogus charges.

Russian authorities failed to investigate the July 2022 explosion in Olenivka prison—which [killed and injured](#) at least 150 Ukrainian POWs—in a Russian-occupied area or allow independent investigators on site.

The UN Monitoring Mission also documented cases of torture and inhuman treatment by Ukraine of Russian POWs and noted in June the “lack of significant developments” in Ukraine’s investigations of allegations of extrajudicial executions of Russian POWs. Human Rights Watch is not aware of any ongoing investigations into [alleged abuse](#) by Ukrainian fighters of Russian POWs in 2022.

Following her September visit to Ukraine, the UN special rapporteur on torture [acknowledged](#) “sincere efforts” made by the Ukrainian authorities to treat Russian POWs held in detention facilities in Ukraine respectfully.

Conflict-Related Civilian Detainees

Russian forces continued to unlawfully detain and forcibly disappear local public officials, civil society activists, volunteers, teachers, and other Ukrainian civilians. Many were forcibly transferred to Russia and Russian-occupied areas, denied access to legal counsel, and held incommunicado without charge, sometimes [for months](#).

Between February 2022 and May 2023, the UN Monitoring Mission documented 77 cases of Russian summary executions of Ukrainian civilians and the widespread practice of torturing and ill-treating of civilian detainees. Of over 900 documented cases of arbitrary detention of civilians during that period, [864 were perpetrated](#) by Russian forces. Of those detained, 260 were civilians held for their perceived political views. More than 91 percent of the 864 detainees described being subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence. The UN Monitoring Mission also documented 75 cases of arbitrary detention by Ukrainian security forces, mostly of individuals suspected of conflict-related criminal offences, with 57 percent of those held saying they were subjected to torture and ill-treatment, predominantly in unofficial places of detention.

In May, Ukrainian authorities [established](#) a unified registry of missing persons to systematize the collection and sharing of information and to financially support [families](#). By August, [the register](#) had the names of 25,000 people disappeared since 2022.

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

By September, Ukrainian authorities documented 231 cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) perpetrated by Russian forces in occupied areas of Ukraine and in Russian detention facilities. The true figures are likely much higher, as stigma, shame, and fear of reprisals prevent survivors from seeking help. As of October, [34 Russian servicemen](#) were under investigation by Ukrainian authorities for committing CRSV, 18 cases were on trial, and 2 perpetrators had been sentenced to 12 and 10 years in prison. All proceedings were conducted in absentia. The UN CoI

reported in August that Russian authorities had used rape and sexual violence constituting torture against both men and women in detention.

Survivors faced significant challenges in accessing medical, psychosocial, and legal assistance. To address these challenges, in June, parliament considered amendments to criminal legislation concerning the investigation and adjudication of CRSV and a draft law on reparations for victims of war crimes that includes CRSV survivors.

In May, civil society representatives launched a [petition](#) to [make](#) emergency contraception drugs in Ukraine prescription-free. The Health Ministry was reviewing the petition at time of writing.

Attacks on Education

Throughout the year, Russian forces continued to attack schools and other educational facilities across Ukraine. The Ukrainian government reported that 3,790 educational facilities were damaged or destroyed from February 2022 to September 2023.

Large-scale damage and destruction to schools has had a devastating effect on Ukrainian children's access to education and a profound psychosocial impact on children, parents, and teachers. Ukraine took important measures to prevent schools from coming under attack. Authorities also took steps to ensure that children could continue their education, combining distance and in-person learning, and over 95 percent of students nationwide remained in school.

Children whose regular schools were severely damaged or destroyed relocated to other schools nearby, where in some instances they attended a shortened school day or studied in shifts to accommodate the increased number of students. Many had to switch entirely to remote learning.

Repair and reconstruction of schools were ongoing, with reconstruction efforts varying greatly in different parts of Ukraine, partly due to continuing hostilities.

Children in Institutions

Children in institutions in areas directly affected by the war, [forcibly transferred](#) to Russia or Russian-occupied territories, or evacuated to other areas of Ukraine continue to [face](#) risks. The war [added](#) urgency for Ukraine, with international support, to expand family- and community-based care to ensure that all children in institutions affected by the war, including children with disabilities, are not re-institutionalized.

Impact on Older Civilians

In May, the UN Monitoring Mission [documented](#) the disproportionate impact of the war on older civilians. Although older people make up 25 percent of the population, [32 percent of civilians](#) killed from February 2022 to February 2023 were 60 and older (for cases where age was recorded). Some displaced older people had to be accommodated in nursing homes despite living independently before being displaced. Older people in conflict-affected areas had limited access to [their pensions](#) and [health care](#).

Crimea

The human rights climate in Russian-occupied Crimea worsened. Russian authorities relentlessly targeted anyone actively opposed to the occupation, particularly politically active members of the Crimean Tatar community as well as lawyers, journalists, and activists. According to the Crimean

Tatar Resource Center (CTRC), [at least](#) 66 Crimean Tatars were detained and 93 arrested in the first six months of 2023. Of 37 house searches conducted by Russia's security forces, 29 were of Crimean Tatar homes.

Authorities continued to apply, in some cases retroactively, Russia's vague and overly broad counterterrorism and anti-extremism legislation to prosecute Crimean Tatars for alleged ties with organizations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned in Russia but not in Ukraine. The prosecution overwhelmingly relied on [testimonies](#) from anonymous witnesses and tapped private conversations about religion. Accused were routinely denied due process, including access to lawyers. Since the beginning of the occupation until February 2023, at least 98 [Crimean Tatars](#) were being or had been prosecuted for alleged links with Hizb ut-Tahrir, with 73 serving prison sentences ranging between 10 and 20 years.

In January 2023, a military court in Russia convicted the remaining [5 activists](#) from a group of 25 Crimean [Solidarity](#) members, who had been under criminal investigation since 2019 on what appeared to be spurious terrorism charges, and sentenced them to 13 years in prison.

Throughout 2023, those serving prison sentences on bogus charges were subjected to ill-treatment. The Crimean Tatar representative body Mejlis' Deputy Chairman Nariman Dzhelial, members of Crimean Solidarity Amet Suleymanov and Server Mustafayev, human rights defender [Emir-Usein Kuku](#), journalist [Timur Ibragimov](#), and activists [Rustem Seytmemetov](#) and [Zevri Abseitov](#), among others, were repeatedly denied access to adequate medical care. In February, Dzhemil Gafarov, a Crimean Solidarity activist who was routinely denied necessary medical assistance while serving his sentence, died in a detention facility in Russia.

In January, occupying authorities arbitrarily detained 34 [people](#) who gathered near a courthouse in Simferopol to attend a hearing against a group of Crimean Tatars. Of them, 26 were swiftly sentenced to detention for 10 to 16 days and 1 was fined. In August, a court sentenced 22 Crimean Tatars to up to 7 days' detention for gathering outside a courthouse to attend a hearing.

In May, a court in Russia [placed](#) Crimean Solidarity activist Leniie Umerova, 25, under arrest on espionage charges. Russian security forces first detained Umerova for alleged violation of migration rules after she traveled to Crimea in December 2022 to visit her gravely ill father. Umerova spent 14 weeks in migration detention. Upon release, she was immediately detained again and charged four times with disobeying police orders.

In her April [report](#), the Council of Europe commissioner on human rights stated that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine "worsen[ed] the already deplorable situation of the Crimean Tatar people in the peninsula."

Russian authorities continued the unlawful practice of forcibly conscripting Crimean residents into Russia's armed forces. By September, authorities had [imposed](#) 600 administrative penalties on at least 600 Crimean residents and initiated at least 10 criminal cases on charges of "discrediting Russian armed forces."

In July, authorities [unlawfully transferred](#) a Crimean activist, Iryna Danylovykh, who had been sentenced in 2022 to seven years on fabricated explosives charges, to a detention facility in southern Russia and repeatedly denied her medical care.

In September, a Russian military court [sentenced](#) in absentia the deputy director of Crimean Tatar TV station ATR, Ayder Muzhdabaev, to six years in prison on charges of public incitement to terrorism.

Lack of investigations into enforced disappearances of Crimean Tatars and pro-Ukraine activists when Russia first occupied Crimea in 2014 continued to reinforce the climate of impunity and lawlessness on the peninsula.

Democracy and the Rule of Law

The government advanced EU candidacy-related reforms, taking steps on judicial reform and against corruption.

In March 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a two-year anti-corruption plan, envisaging reforms in numerous government sectors.

In January, the Congress of Judges appointed eight new members to the High Council of Justice (HCJ), reviving its operation since Russia's full-scale invasion. In June, the HCJ [appointed](#) 16 members to the High Qualification Commission of Judges, completing the reform of Ukraine's two top judicial entities. Civil society [cautiously welcomed](#) these developments [except for the](#) inclusion in the commission of two judges whose integrity they questioned.

Reform of Ukraine's Constitutional Court, historically mired in corruption allegations, faced controversy regarding the composition of the special advisory body overseeing candidate vetting. Ukraine's civil society and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission [criticized](#) a December 2022 law for failing to ensure meaningful international expert involvement in the advisory body. [The European Commission](#) also criticized the law, urging adherence to Venice Commission recommendations, including on increasing the number of experts from six to seven. In July, President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a revised bill enhancing the role of international experts but not increasing their number as recommended.

Law enforcement agencies actively investigated high-level corruption scandals. In June, the head of the Supreme Court was arrested on bribery charges. In January, after a corruption investigation by a Ukrainian media outlet and a criminal investigation that followed, the deputy defense minister was [dismissed](#). In September, Ukraine's defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, resigned amid months of corruption scandals related to military spending. These scandals involved allegations of the ministry inflating purchasing costs of basic supplies, such as clothes and food, for the army. Six of Reznikov's deputy ministers were dismissed two weeks later. In January 2023, the deputy prosecutor general resigned following a controversy around his vacationing abroad in violation of martial law.

In September, the SBU, Ukraine's security service, arrested controversial oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky on fraud and money-laundering charges.

Ukrainian authorities continued to implement a controversial 2022 law on collaboration with Russian forces and occupation authorities, which international actors and domestic groups criticized as vague, overly broad, and wrongfully putting a wide range of Ukrainian civil servants, doctors, and teachers at risk of administrative and criminal liability. Authorities opened [thousands](#) of criminal proceedings under the law, and at time of writing, courts had handed down at least 500 guilty verdicts.

Key International Actors

Ukraine's allies provided extensive military, political, and financial support to the country. Governments and other international actors continued to offer Ukraine evidentiary, technical, and operational assistance to help to bolster its judicial capacity to prosecute war crimes.

Ukraine and other actors pursued multiple pathways for international justice and accountability, including through the principle of universal jurisdiction. For example, in June, a Ukrainian group and an international one filed a criminal complaint with the German Federal Public Prosecutor's Office against four Russian servicemen, including two high-ranking officials, in support of a Ukrainian survivor of CRSV.

Putin did not travel to Johannesburg for the August BRICS summit of the heads of state of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. As an ICC member, South Africa would have been obligated to arrest Putin if he had arrived there.

The UN CoI conducted numerous fact-finding missions and publicized its findings, including in a detailed March report that described a wide range of abuses committed by Russian forces in Ukraine, some of which, according to the commission, may have amounted to crimes against humanity. The commission also documented a “small number of violations committed by Ukrainian armed forces, including likely indiscriminate attacks and two incidents that qualify as war crimes.”

At least [21 government leaders and officials](#), including from countries supporting Ukraine’s war effort, expressed concern over the US government’s decision to transfer cluster munitions to Ukraine. The UN special rapporteur on torture urged the US government to reconsider the transfer, [warning](#) of the risk of “serious, indiscriminate harm to civilians both immediately and in the long term.” In July, the then-Ukrainian defense minister [committed](#) to Ukrainian forces using cluster munitions only “in the fields where there is a concentration of Russian military” and to keeping a strict record of their use.

The UN special rapporteur on torture visited Ukraine in September and [characterized](#) Russian forces’ use of torture in Ukraine as “orchestrated” and “part of a [s]tate policy to intimidate, instill fear, punish, or extract information and confessions.” She commended the Ukrainian authorities’ efforts on war crimes documentation and listed obstacles to achieving justice for victims, including the loss of crucial evidence and the need for reform of Ukraine’s criminal justice system.

In September, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) began hearings on Russia’s preliminary objections in the case that Ukraine lodged concerning Russia’s allegations of genocide as grounds for launching the full-scale invasion. This is one of the two cases that Ukraine filed against Russia at the ICJ.

Despite ongoing pressure from civil society and its international allies, Ukraine has not ratified the Rome Statute, which it signed in 2000.

The EU [condemned](#) Russia for exacerbating the global food security crisis by withdrawing from the UN-brokered Black Sea Grain initiative, crucial for ensuring the safe export of grain and fertilizers from Ukraine to 45 countries. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also voiced regret regarding Russia’s decision and continues to urge Russia to recommit to the initiative.

In May, Guterres’ special representative for children and armed conflict met with Russia’s children’s rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova, who was indicted by the ICC over possible war crimes involving illegal deportations and transfers of Ukrainian children to Russia and Russian-occupied Ukraine. Human Rights Watch and other rights groups denounced the meeting.

In June, the European Commission submitted [a proposal](#) to the EU Council and European Parliament to establish the “Ukraine Facility,” a €50 billion financial instrument for 2024-2027 aimed at providing recovery and reconstruction assistance to and supporting Ukraine in its EU integration. Civil society groups and international partners lobbied for the Ukraine Facility to support a comprehensive reform of the child protection and care system in Ukraine and transition from institutional to family- and community-based care for all children.

In November, the European Commission published its enlargement report on Ukraine, recommending the EU open accession negotiations and noting Ukraine’s “powerful reform dynamic despite the ongoing war” and its progress to meet the seven steps attached to its EU candidate status. The commission recommended adopting the enlargement negotiating framework—the next step of the accession process—once Ukraine has implemented remaining key measures related to fighting corruption, de-oligarchization, and the rights of national minorities. In its report, the commission highlighted that Ukraine should work toward ratifying the Rome Statute of the ICC as a matter of priority over the next 12 months. At time of writing, the decision by EU member

states on whether to open accession talks with Ukraine was pending and expected in December 2023.