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The State of the World's Human Rights; Ukraine 2025

Russia continued indiscriminate attacks on heavily populated areas, targeted critical civilian infrastructure and appeared to deliberately target civilians. Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees were subjected to torture, enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention in Russian-occupied territories, where repression of non-Russian identities continued. Investigative journalists reported being subjected to targeted smear campaigns. The right to freedom of religion was restricted. Conscientious objectors were denied alternative service and prosecuted. Prosecution for collaboration raised fair trial concerns.

Background

Russia continued to pursue further territorial gains and increased the intensity and scale of deep strikes across Ukraine. The war of attrition took a considerable toll on both sides. Ukraine developed, produced and deployed innovative military hardware and tactics and sought to reduce its huge dependence on foreign-supplied weapons systems and ammunition. Its negotiators resisted US pressure to make territorial and other concessions as part of a peace deal with Russia.

The number of civilian casualties remained high with a total of 14,999 killed and 40,601 injured between 24 February 2022 and September 2025. June and July were the deadliest months on record for the civilian population of Ukraine since April 2022.

The economy remained fragile and deeply dependent on foreign financing and other aid. The authorities' attempts to weaken anti-corruption institutions through new legislation were thwarted by popular protests. While severe energy shortages escalated, Ukraine's National Anti-Corruption Bureau and a specialized prosecutor's office uncovered an alleged kickback scheme in the energy sector, leading to high-level arrests and resignations. EU membership remained a priority, while the prospect of NATO membership appeared increasingly uncertain.

Violations of international humanitarian law

Unlawful attacks

Intensifying Russian aerial attacks across Ukraine included indiscriminate strikes inside heavily populated areas, targeting of critical civilian infrastructure and the targeting of civilians, which amounted to war crimes.¹ The UN-established Independent International Commission of

Inquiry on Ukraine concluded that Russian drone attacks targeting civilians in the Kherson region constituted the crime against humanity of murder and war crimes.

The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine reported that most civilian casualties occurred near the frontline. In December, they comprised 67% of the total, with nearly 30% caused by First Person View (FPV) drone attacks. With the advent of colder months, Russia targeted energy infrastructure almost daily.² By November, official figures suggested that energy generation was less than half its pre-February 2022 level. Millions endured heating and power shortages, with electricity on some days limited to three hours a day as temperatures dropped. In response, from September Ukraine launched reciprocal attacks on energy infrastructures inside Russia, causing temporary local power blackouts.

According to the UN, 472 civilians were killed and 1,188 injured by mines or other explosives between February 2022 and December 2025.

Extrajudicial executions

According to media reports, as of 10 December the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine had documented 322 cases in which Ukrainian prisoners of war were executed by Russian forces since the start of the full-scale war. In August, Vladyslav Nahornyj was captured near the city of Pokrovsk in Donetsk region. He told Ukrainian media that he and seven other Ukrainian prisoners of war were tortured by Russian forces, who then killed the others. Despite having his throat slit, he survived and crawled back to a Ukrainian position.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Russia continued to deny any international monitors access to prisoners of war held in occupied Ukraine and elsewhere, and systematically subjected such prisoners to enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention (see Russia entry). Prisoners released through exchanges testified to widespread torture and other ill-treatment, including denial of medical care and malnutrition, and regular deaths.³ One prisoner, who had spent 33 months in Russian captivity, weighed only 40kg when Amnesty International interviewed him weeks after his release in January. Another former prisoner died of poor health in November, aged 46, six months after his release.

Russian prisoners of war held by Ukraine who were visited by Amnesty International delegates in April and September, in two prisoner camps, described incidents of ill-treatment at the point of capture. There were also minor complaints about their treatment in the camps where they were subsequently held; for example, over the limited range of food in the camp's store. Non-Russian captives reported racist slurs by fellow prisoners and guards.

Freedom of expression

Ukraine's derogation from its obligations under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, covering freedom of expression, remained in effect.

Investigative journalists reported being targeted by coordinated smear campaigns and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) initiated by officials and business people impacted by their investigations. Environmental reporter Olena Mudra was subjected to a campaign of discrediting articles and fabricated imagery in online media after reporting on a controversial wind farm project.

Anti-corruption activist Vitaliy Shabunin faced a criminal investigation on suspicion of fraud, widely regarded as retribution for his history of criticizing the Ministry of Defence and the President's Office over weapon procurement.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

In July, spontaneous protests erupted in the capital Kyiv and elsewhere, against legislation undermining key anti-corruption institutions. Despite martial law restrictions and concerns over Russian aerial attacks targeting open gatherings, hundreds of protesters remained in the streets for 10 days until their demands were effectively met.

Freedom of religion and belief

Further steps were taken to disband the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). The state regulator requested that the UOC "break its ties" with the Russian Orthodox Church. The UOC refused, claiming it had already done so. Litigation involving its Kyiv diocese followed in September, with no decision delivered by year's end. In October, UN experts criticized the legislation behind these proceedings as lacking legal certainty and falsely "equating religious affiliation with threats to national security". They also warned of "persecution" against the UOC, criticized prosecutions of clergy, a journalist and a defence lawyer as "collective punishment", and urged Ukraine to cease such trials and review restrictive laws.

Conscientious objectors' rights

On 1 May, the Supreme Court of Ukraine ruled that citizens could not refuse military service during wartime based on religious beliefs and that an alternative form of service was only available during peacetime. The court noted that conscientious objectors' beliefs should nonetheless be "considered" to enable them to perform conscription duties that would "not involve carrying and/or using weapons". The ruling upheld the conviction of the applicant, a Jehovah's Witness, but replaced his three-year custodial sentence with one year of probation.

Older people's rights

Older people continued to suffer disproportionate harm from Russia's aggression, with particularly high casualty rates near the frontline, where many chose to remain due to concerns over housing, access to services and the risks of isolation if displaced. On 9 September, a Russian aerial strike in the village of Yarova, Donetsk region, killed 25 people and injured 19, most of them pensioners queuing at a postal services vehicle.

More than half of the residents in temporary shelters (housing around 2% of the displaced population) were people aged over 60. According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, as of January, 70% of shelters lacked accessible sanitary provisions and 65% lacked accessible bomb shelters.⁴

Universal pensions for people of retirement age left older people below the real subsistence minimum of UAH 7,461 (USD 178) per month, with 62% of pensioners receiving less than UAH 5,000 (USD 119) per month.

Children's rights

The number of children killed in Russian strikes increased by more than 200% between March and May compared to the previous quarter, according to the UN.

Children were reportedly clandestinely recruited online for attacks on military objects, sabotage or information gathering. At least two boys reportedly died and one was injured while undertaking such missions. In addition, according to the UN, as of May, 91 boys and 12 girls were in detention. Forty-two children were convicted of terrorism, spying and sabotage-related offences, leading to the incarceration of at least seven children.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Members of Territorial Recruitment Centres (TRC) continued to forcibly apprehend draft-age men in public spaces for military conscription. Videos showing violence by TRC staff emerged, alongside reports of physical and other abuse and even fatalities.

Roman Sopin was stopped in Kyiv on 18 October and taken to the local TRC. The next day he was hospitalized with a severe head injury and he died on 23 October. The TRC claimed he had had a fall. Police only opened a criminal investigation six days later, following a public outcry. No outcome had been reported by the end of the year.

Unfair trials

Custodial and non-custodial sentences were handed down to hundreds of people convicted for "collaboration activities". According to OHCHR, the UN human rights office, dozens were convicted "for actions that could lawfully be compelled by the occupying Power." Human rights monitors emphasized that the practice was inconsistent and the vaguely-worded

charges were wrongly applied in some cases to those providing essential services or pursuing survival strategies under occupation.

On 8 October, Viktoria Krykunova was sentenced to five years in prison for working briefly at a Russian-controlled pension fund in 2022, which she said was to finance her family's relocation to government-controlled territory.

LGBTI people's rights

As part of EU accession plans approved in May, Ukraine committed to adopting the 2023 draft bill on civil (including same-sex) partnerships, but had failed to do so by year's end. In June, in the first decision of its kind, a local court in Kyiv recognized a same-sex couple as a "de facto family" under Ukrainian law.

On 14 June, Kyiv hosted a Pride march, with more than 1,500 participants. Attendance was capped and prior registration required, due to martial law.

In June, a survey found that over 50% of the population supported same-sex unions and more than 70% supported equal rights for LGBTI people, reflecting notable progress in attitudes.

Right to a healthy environment

In February, conflict-related emissions since the beginning of the full-scale invasion were said to have reached the equivalent of 230 metric tons of CO₂. Russia's ongoing war of aggression continued to cause major environmental damage and risk environmental calamities. On 14 February, Ukrainian authorities reported a Russian overnight drone strike on the protective shelter over Chornobyl's damaged reactor, raising the risk of radioactive leakage.

In September, the International Atomic Energy Agency expressed concern that their seven indispensable pillars of nuclear safety were being compromised at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

According to media reports, on 8 November Russian drones destroyed Ukraine's first industrial biomass power plant, which had been a symbol of Ukraine's push for green energy.

Russian-occupied territories (Government of Russia)

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression remained severely restricted, with limits on access by independent media and on the free flow of information. Attempts to exercise this right were punishable by

imprisonment and other severe penalties under Russia's national legislation and practices (see Russia entry).

Arbitrary deprivation of nationality

In March, Russia enacted legislation that obliged Ukrainian nationals without the formal right to reside in the Russian Federation to leave or "regularize their legal status" by 10 September. If they failed to do this they would face "forcible removal". For the residents of the occupied territories in particular, compliance meant obtaining Russian passports or residence permits as "foreigners" to avoid deportation.

Internally displaced people's rights

Russia continued to take forward legislation to deprive the residents of the territories it unlawfully annexed in 2022 of their property and other rights if they refused to take up Russian citizenship, in manifest violation of the laws of war. In March, it updated the legislation which forbade citizens of Ukraine and other "unfriendly states" from "registering property rights to real estate" in these territories until 2028. Further legislation in July invalidated any Ukrainian documents confirming property rights in these territories except by official validation or (for post-September 2022 documents) strict exemption. Legislation adopted in December enabled the seizure and reassignment of so-called "ownerless" properties – a measure expressly targeting persons displaced from the occupied Ukrainian territories.

Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance

Ukrainian civilians were routinely subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, prolonged incommunicado detention, enforced disappearance and other inhumane treatment. These abuses remained commonplace in both the occupied territories and, for transferred individuals, in Russia.

In March, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine described the practice of enforced disappearance and torture as crimes against humanity committed by Russian authorities "as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population and pursuant to a coordinated state policy".

In May, the Ukrainian Ombudsperson reported documenting almost 16,000 cases of arbitrary detention by occupying Russian authorities since 2014, with more than 1,800 people being held in custody inside Russia at the time.

Torture and other ill-treatment

According to a report in September by OHCHR, the UN human rights office, over 92% of 216 released civilian detainees interviewed between June 2023 and September 2025 gave

consistent and detailed accounts of having been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during their captivity. The report noted that 38 civilians had died in custody as a result of torture or other ill-treatment, poor detention conditions, or denial of necessary medical care.

Right to education

The occupying authorities continued to restrict or eliminate non-Russian language education under the Russian curriculum uniformly imposed in all occupied territories. This subjected children to indoctrination and denied them a quality education. Instruction in Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar further declined, hindered by systemic obstacles and families deterred from pursuing it. By the start of the new school year in September, all academic disciplines involving the study of, or in, “the native (Ukrainian) language” were removed from Russian federal school programmes. The only option remaining was to study Ukrainian as an extracurricular subject.

Right to water

Donetsk, Mariupol, Makiivka and other occupied towns faced a worsening water crisis. Pre-war water infrastructure cutting across the front line, including the Siverskyi Donets-Donbas canal, remained in ruins; reservoirs dried up; and the occupying authorities failed to develop reliable alternative supply sources. By year’s end, water reportedly reached some locations by pipes for only three to four hours once every three days; its poor quality made it unsafe for drinking. Makeshift supplies, including water deliveries by truck, were sparse and unreliable, leading to long queues and incidents of violence. Monitors described the situation as a humanitarian emergency.

