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Freedom in the World 2025 - Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine*

Not Free

-1

/ 100

Political Rights -2 / 40

Civil Liberties 1 / 60

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. [See the methodology.](#)

* Indicates a territory as opposed to an independent country.

A Note on Related Territories

Territories are sometimes assessed separately from related countries if they meet certain criteria, including significantly different conditions for political rights and civil liberties, and boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow annual comparisons.

Note

Freedom in the World reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Related, disputed, or occupied territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including distinct conditions for political rights and civil liberties and boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. Beginning with *Freedom in the World 2025*, the conditions in Crimea and eastern Donbas are assessed together with other newly occupied territories of Ukraine, including in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, in a single Russian-occupied territories report, given the

similarities in conditions of all the territories under Russian occupation. For more information, see the report [methodology](#) and [FAQ](#).

Overview

Russian military forces now control most of the Ukrainian regions of Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk, and parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. Following illegal invasions in 2014 and 2022, these regions were annexed by the Russian Federation and subject to its repressive legislation, in contravention of international law. The occupation government severely limits political and civil rights, has silenced independent media, and employs antiterrorism and other laws against political dissidents. The rule of law and civil liberties are not respected. Members of an Indigenous minority group, the Crimean Tatars, many of whom had vocally opposed the Russian occupation, have faced acute repression by the authorities. Ukrainian citizens have been compelled to adopt Russian passports, with those who refuse face denial of basic services and medical care, physical assaults and intimidation, expropriation of property, and expulsion from the regions.

Key Developments in 2024

- A report released by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in December described evidence of dozens of executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war by Russian military forces, as well as their torture and ill treatment, including sexual abuse. Rights monitors documented continued, systematic efforts by the Russian and Belarusian regimes to indoctrinate, reeducate, and militarize Ukrainian children. A resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in December called Russian military activities in Ukraine a “war of aggression,” marking the first time such language had appeared in that context.
- Russian authorities conducted elections in the occupied territories on various dates throughout the year as part of larger Russian elections. The moves drew condemnation from democracies around the world, who denounced the polls as illegitimate and a violation of international law.
- Russian authorities continued a repressive campaign to impose Russian passports on Ukrainian citizens in occupied territories, including by withholding basic services and pensions, and requiring the passports to prove child custody and property ownership. By 2024, almost all residents in occupied territories reportedly held Russian passports.
- Occupying authorities continued to expropriate property without compensation and to implement measures that made property expropriation from Ukrainian citizens easier. In June, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) recognized a “systemic campaign of

large-scale expropriation/nationalization of property belonging to civilians and private enterprises in Crimea.”

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

All executive authority figures in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine were imposed by Russian authorities in undemocratic processes backed by Russian military power. Regional executive leaders serving in 2024, Sergey Aksyonov of Crimea, Kherson Governor Vladimir Saldo, Luhansk leader Leonid Pasechnik, Donetsk leader Denis Pushilin, and Yevgeniy Balytskiy of Zaporizhzhia, were under international sanctions for actions undermining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

Russian authorities conducted presidential, regional, and municipal elections in the occupied territories on various dates in 2024 as part of larger Russian elections. The move drew condemnation from democracies around the world, who denounced them illegitimate and violations of international law.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

Legislative elections in regions of Russian-occupied Ukraine have been organized by Russian and occupation authorities and contested exclusively by candidates who backed the occupation. Ukrainian parties are banned.

Elections were held in 2024 in Crimea; the polls were condemned by democratic governments as illegal and a violation of international law.

In occupied areas of Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk Regions, Russian-administered elections to regional councils were held in 2023 with Russia’s ruling party, United Russia winning large majorities in each poll. The procedures allowed no meaningful competition and featured voter intimidation by armed soldiers. Democratic governments similarly condemned the elections.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 0 / 4

Occupying authorities have tailored electoral systems to ensure control by Moscow. Legitimate opposition forces are denied registration before the

voting begins, leaving voters with the choice of either abstaining or endorsing pro-Russian candidates. The 2023 elections in Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia featured military forces coercing individuals to vote through home and workplace visits.

Authorities in the occupied parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Regions use violence and terror to ensure Russian control. In December 2024, Ukrainian authorities reported that the mayor of Dniprorudne, Yevhen Matveyev, was killed after being tortured while in Russian custody. The town, in Zaporizhzhia Region, had been occupied since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. A 2022 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report described the illegal arrest and detention of a number of local mayors, other elected officials, and civil servants who refused to cooperate with Russian authorities. The report additionally described the detention and abuse of family members of local officials.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, 0 / and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of 4 these competing parties or groupings?

Ukrainian political parties are banned in areas of Ukraine occupied by Russian forces, and United Russia and other Kremlin-approved factions dominate the political system. Russian and occupation authorities use legal restrictions, intimidation, harassment, and the threat of violence to suppress attempts to mobilize politically against the occupation and war. Ukrainian activists, elected officials, and others affiliated with the Ukrainian state have been imprisoned, abducted, and killed.

In June 2024, the Russian Supreme Court banned a nonexistent “Anti-Russian Separatist Movement,” prompting concern that the measure would become another tool to persecute Ukrainians who question the Russian annexation of their occupied homelands.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its 0 / support or gain power through elections? 4

Because Ukrainian political parties and citizens are not allowed to compete in elections and Russian authorities tightly control the political and electoral systems, there is no opportunity for a genuine political opposition to form, compete, or take power in Russian-occupied territories. Any pro-Ukrainian views remain banned from public discourse and can draw heavy punishment when openly expressed.

In 2022, the Russian parliament enacted new laws that criminalized “false” or critical speech about the Russian military, effectively outlawing

opposition to the invasion. In December 2024, the Russian Duma expanded the law on espionage and treason to apply to anyone affiliated with “activities knowingly directed against the security of the Russian Federation.” The section was previously limited to penalizing people who joined an enemy’s armed forces, and analysts said the new language could be broadly applied in occupied territories to punish criticism of the occupation or war.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 0 / 4

Individuals in the occupied territories risk severe repression for support or pursuit of political objectives that deviate from those enforced by occupation authorities. Russia’s military and armed security services exercise tremendous influence over local affairs in the context of occupation and war. Soldiers and other uniformed personnel have played a prominent role in carrying out elections, and use pressure and intimidation to drive residents to the polls. Public employees have been threatened with termination if they do not vote.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 0 / 4

Occupation authorities deny full political rights to all residents, but Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians are regarded with particular suspicion and face comparatively greater persecution than ethnic Russians. Residents who lack a Russian passport are considered stateless by occupation authorities. By 2024, occupation authorities had coerced most residents to obtain a Russian passport by withholding essential services from those who lacked one.

In Crimea, the headquarters of the Mejlis, the Crimean Tatars’ representative body, was closed by the occupation authorities in 2014 and banned in 2016, and its leadership and members have been harshly persecuted. In 2022, Mejlis first deputy chairman Nariman Dzhelyal was sentenced to 17 years in prison on terrorism charges, and in 2023 transferred to a location in Siberia.

Women formally have equal political rights, but they remain underrepresented in leadership positions in practice, and government officials demonstrate little interest in gender-equality issues.

Russian authorities disseminate anti-LGBT+ propaganda and regularly threaten LGBT+ people with aggressive rhetoric; violent attacks against LGBT+ people and people perceived as LGBT+ have been reported. In November 2023, Russia’s Supreme Court declared the “international LGBT

public movement" to be an "extremist organization" and banned its activities, driving LGBT+ activists underground or into exile.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 0 / 4

All major policy decisions are made in Moscow and executed by Russian president Vladimir Putin's representatives or the local authorities, who were not freely elected and are beholden to the Kremlin. In areas where military operations continue, most policy decisions are related to the situation on the battlefield.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 0 / 4

Corruption is widespread in the occupied areas, and there are no effective mechanisms in place to combat it. While local authorities regularly report arrests among customs and police officials, there is no evidence that systemic corruption is effectively curtailed as a result. Some elements of the Russian-backed leadership, including Aksyonov and the speaker of Crimea's State Council, Vladimir Konstantinov, reputedly have ties to organized crime.

In recent years, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) has arrested a number of Crimean officials as part of an ostensible antigraft campaign. Many arrests involved allegations that local authorities embezzled Russian funds meant to support the occupation, but some have been linked to infighting between Crimean and Russian officials over control of the peninsula's assets. In 2024 acting deputy governor of Sevastopol city Yevgeny Gorlov was detained, and Krasnoperekopsk administration head Vadim Khomin and his deputy were placed under house arrest, on bribery allegations.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 0 / 4

With strict controls on the media and few other means of holding officials accountable, residents struggle to obtain information about the functioning of the government. Changes in government positions and personnel are communicated with little explanation or public discussion, if at all. Budget processes are opaque.

Since the launch of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian authorities have restricted access to basic information about the war. In Crimea, there is little available information about sanatoriums and summer camps that where Ukrainian children from the occupied territories are subjected to militarized Russian reeducation.

Add Q

Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a -2 culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?

The Russian government has taken steps to establish ethnic Russian domination and punish expressions of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar identity in occupied territories. Authorities have taken steps to eliminate the Ukrainian language in schools and have persecuted the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. In Crimea, authorities have forcefully repressed Crimean Tatar communities by banning the Mejlis and persecuting Tatar activists.

Since the launch of the full-scale invasion in 2022, thousands of Ukrainians have been killed and thousands more have fled, or been forcibly transferred to other occupied Ukrainian territories or to Russia.

Throughout the occupied territories, Russian authorities deny medical services and pension payments to individuals who do not obtain Russian passports. Russian authorities have refused to acknowledge property ownership of individuals who do not possess a Russian passport; failing to obtain a Russian passport can also reportedly result in imprisonment or losing custody of one's children. Men who obtain Russian passports can be conscripted into the Russian armed forces, and there are reports of individuals who resist conscription being the target of violent attacks by Russian soldiers. In occupied regions of Kherson, people who refuse Russian passports have reportedly been subject to violent attacks and threats of imprisonment. In September 2023, a young married couple were killed in the village of Mali Kopani; family members said because they refused to accept Russian passports. Russian authorities also offer incentives to people in occupied areas to accept Russian passports, as well as incentives for Russian citizens to move to the occupied areas.

In Crimea, Russian and local pro-Russian officials' policies have led to an influx of hundreds of thousands of people from Russia, including Russian troops, civilian personnel, and their families. Ukrainian authorities said in December 2024 that more than 50,000 Crimean residents had been conscripted since 2014; many have been deployed far from the peninsula. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), using open-source data, in 2024 had verified the identities of more than a thousand dead soldiers from Crimea who had fought against Ukraine.

Numerous cases of deportation of children, including orphans, from occupied areas of Kherson Region to occupied Crimea, Russia, and Belarus have been documented. In the camps, children are subjected to an indoctrination campaign that includes Russian patriotic education, military training, pressure to assume Russian citizenship, and punishment

for expressions of Ukrainian identity. Such facilities are also present in occupied eastern Ukraine.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 0 / 4

Media freedom is severely curtailed in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, where only “official” local broadcasters, websites, and print media are sanctioned. Local outlets largely republish propaganda from local and Russian authorities. Coverage of the war against Ukraine closely resembles that seen in Russian state media, where it is described as a “special military operation.” Journalists are subject to restrictive Russian laws, including a penal code provision that prescribes imprisonment for public calls for action against Russia’s territorial integrity, which may be interpreted as banning statements against the occupation. In March 2022, Putin signed a measure imposing penalties of up to 15 years in prison for discrediting or spreading “false” information about the Russian military and its activities.

Ukraine’s Institute of Mass Information has reported numerous arbitrary detentions and abductions of journalists and bloggers in the occupied territories of eastern Donbas and Kherson Region since the start of the full-scale invasion. The Crimean Human Rights Group and RFE/RL reported in October 2023 that journalist and activist Serhiy Tsyhupa had been abducted in Kherson Region and sentenced to 13 years in prison by Crimea’s Supreme Court. In 2024 he was transported under guard from Simferopol to Russia. In early 2024, in Crimea, journalists Aziz Azizov and Rustem Osmanov were arrested, prompting denunciations from rights monitors including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The ZMINA Human Rights Center reported in November 2024 that at least 18 Crimean journalists are imprisoned. Ukrainian officials said in October 2024 that Victoria Roshchyna, a Ukrainian journalist, had died in Russian captivity the previous month. She is widely believed to have been abducted by Russian forces in 2023 while working in occupied Luhansk Region.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 0 / 4

Adherents of faiths not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church are subject to persecution throughout the occupied territories.

In Crimea, the occupation authorities forced religious organizations to reregister under new rules after seizing control in 2014, sharply reducing the number of registered religious groups. All 22 Jehovah’s Witnesses congregations were deregistered after the Russian Supreme Court ruled

in 2017 that the group had violated laws against extremism. In 2020, authorities began issuing prison sentences to adherents for their activity. Most Muslims in Crimea are Crimean Tatars, and mosques associated with the community have been denied permission to register. Muslims in Crimea have also faced legal discrimination and accusations that they belong to Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist group that is banned in Russia but not in Ukraine. Those prosecuted for alleged membership in Crimea are denied due process, with authorities often relying on testimony from anonymous witnesses, including FSB agents.

A senior figure in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine said in 2024 that the Crimean diocese had ceased to exist, in part because clergy had fled due to the risk of being drafted into the Russian military. Occupation authorities have confiscated numerous properties from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and, in 2024, destroyed the Holy Cross Church of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Yevpatoria.

Only the Russian Orthodox Church is free to operate in the occupied territory of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Regions, as well as in eastern Donbas. All other religions are restricted or persecuted. Property of the Ukrainian church has been transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate, and Ukrainian priests are persecuted. In February 2024, the Russian military abducted, tortured and killed Ukrainian priest Stepan Podolchak. He conducted services in Kalanchak in the Ukrainian language and had refused to join the Moscow Patriarchate.

In the occupied regions of Donbas, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the Greek Catholic Church, have faced severe repression. Most Jews, Catholics, and members of other religious minorities are thought to have left Russian-controlled eastern areas since 2014.

D3 0-4 pts

**Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free 0 /
from extensive political indoctrination? 4**

Academic freedom is restricted throughout the occupied territories, where authorities have worked to integrate schools and universities into the Russian education system. Schools are a key component of Russian state policy of indoctrinating Ukrainian children with Russian patriotic education. Some universities were destroyed during hostilities, and those that survive participate in the Russian policy of indoctrinating students.

In Crimea, schools must use the Russian state curriculum, and students are exposed to Russian military propaganda. Some students, including those transferred from other occupied territories of Ukraine, have also received basic military training in Crimea in recent years. Instruction in the Ukrainian language has been almost completely eliminated. Access to education in the Crimean Tatar language has been reduced, but

somewhat less drastically. After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, occupation authorities began dismissing and prosecuting teachers in Crimea for allegedly discrediting the Russian military, over opposition to the war or contradicting official propaganda narratives.

Teachers in the occupied part of the Kherson Region are similarly forced to work under Russian patriotic education programs. Teachers from Crimea and Russia have been brought to Kherson region to implement Russian curriculums. In a number of cities, "Warrior Centers" aim to educate "a new generation of patriots and defenders of Russia, and to prepare young people for military service in the Russian Armed Forces."

In occupied Donbas, local universities and high schools gradually switched to Russian standards after 2020, introducing new curriculums with revised history lessons and reduced Ukrainian-language instruction. In 2022, the local education system was forcibly integrated into the Russian system throughout the occupied areas, with schoolbooks being sent from the Russian Federation. Political indoctrination is rampant and directed at the younger generation. A main vehicle for this is the Yunarmia militarized youth organization, which operates throughout the area.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 0 / 4

Individuals who express opposition to Russian occupation are subject to persecution, including criminal prosecution. In some areas, former prisoners' accounts of torture and abuse in custody serve to deter free discussion. Russian occupying authorities have established telecommunications infrastructure that subjects internet users to the same censorship and surveillance regimes as in the Russian Federation.

In Crimea, the FSB has opened criminal cases against those who criticize the oppression of Crimean Tatars. Crimeans have also begun to face prosecution for displaying Ukrainian symbols and slogans and singing Ukrainian songs, under an administrative article prohibiting public display of Nazi symbols.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 0 / 4

Freedom of assembly is severely restricted, and public opposition to occupation authorities can result in intimidation, prosecution, detention, and physical abuse.

In Crimea, public events cannot proceed without permission from the authorities, and the Crimean government lists the locations where they can be held. Permission to hold demonstrations is frequently denied, and

when protests do proceed, participants are often arrested. Authorities have handed activists warning notes threatening them with prosecution if they hold planned events. Crimean Tatar activists have been known to receive such notes before the anniversary of a 1944 mass deportation and Crimean Tatar Flag Day. However, some Crimeans are participating in underground resistance movements, connecting online and posting leaflets opposing the occupation and affirming Ukrainian unity. The Yellow Ribbon Movement organized such actions in several cities in Crimea in 2024.

In the occupied territory of the Kherson Region, Russian authorities have banned freedom of assembly, justifying the move by noting ongoing military hostilities. In 2022, a number of peaceful protests against the occupation were violently dispersed by the Russian military. Protesters have been tortured after being taken into detention by Russian forces.

In occupied Donbas, attempts to hold rallies, such as during a miners' strike in 2020, are quickly thwarted by security services. In September 2023, Donetsk occupation authorities explicitly banned all forms of mass gatherings, citing martial law; organizers of potential protests in the region must apply for permission from a Russian regional security agency.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 0 / 4

The occupation authorities, including the FSB, repress all independent political and civic organizations. Remaining nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are subject to harsh Russian laws that enable state interference and obstruct foreign funding. NGO leaders are regularly harassed and arrested for their work. LGBT+ organizations have been officially considered "extremist" since November 2023, and their human rights work has become impossible.

In Crimea, most civil society organizations left the occupied territories during the military seizure in 2014.

In the occupied territory of the Kherson Region, Ukrainian activists have been accused of espionage or acts of international terrorism. Iryna Horobtsova, a volunteer and civil activist, was detained by the Russian military in 2022 and sentenced by an occupation-administered Kherson court to 10.5 years in prison for espionage. Separately, in 2022, Spanish volunteer Mariano García Calatayud was detained in Kherson; a resident of Ukraine for a number of years prior, he had worked helping children left without parental care and had attended antioccupation rallies. It was later reported that he was transferred to a detention facility in Crimea.

In occupied Donbas, Ukrainian and foreign NGOs were expelled in 2016. In July 2024, a court in Donetsk sentenced Vadim Golda, a Ukrainian citizen and former member of the observer mission from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to 14 years in prison for espionage. Two other former OSCE mission members remain in prison on similar charges in Luhansk. The OSCE condemned their detention, calling their treatment “unjust and inhumane.”

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 0 / 4

Trade union rights are formally protected under Russian law, which is applied in occupied areas, but limited in practice. Employers are often able to engage in antiunion discrimination and violate collective-bargaining rights. Occupation authorities have threatened to nationalize property owned by labor unions in Crimea. The environment in occupied areas of Kherson Region is particularly severe because trade unions do not have mechanisms to protect themselves from pressure from the Russian military.

In the occupied eastern Donbas regions, only Russia’s official trade union federation is allowed to operate; its purpose is to rally workers’ support for the occupation authorities. In 2023, the occupation authorities in Donetsk explicitly banned strikes and industrial action, citing martial law; organizers of potential labor actions in the region must apply for permission from a Russian-controlled regional security agency.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 0 / 4

The judiciary and court systems in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine are not independent and their operations are opaque. Officials regularly hand down politically motivated judgments against residents who oppose or are suspected of opposing the occupation and the war against Ukraine, or do journalism or human rights activities.

Russian judges have been transferred from Russia to work in occupied areas of Ukraine. Russian authorities have established 16 new courts in the occupied territory of Kherson Region, and in some trials the prosecution is supported by the Crimean prosecutor’s office. In Zaporizhzhia and eastern Donbas, a number of Russian judges oversee occupation-run courts.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 0 / 4

Due process protections are not upheld in the occupied territories. Arbitrary arrests and detentions, harsh interrogation tactics, falsification of evidence, pressure to waive legal counsel, failure to provide legal counsel, and unfair trials are common. Occupation authorities enforce Russian laws throughout occupied Ukrainian territories, and interrogators have reportedly used force and torture to extract confessions. A number of detainees were held incommunicado in 2024, including the mayor of Hola Prystan, Oleksandr Babych.

Many detainees and prisoners are transferred from occupied Crimea to Russia, in violation of international law, and Crimean residents have faced trial in military courts located in Russia. Since 2022, a similar practice of abducting activists in occupied portions of Kherson Region and transporting them for detention and trial in Crimea has continued. There have been several instances of observers being detained while attempting to attend open court hearings involving Crimean Tatar defendants. A number of Crimean human rights lawyers have been disbarred.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

Residents of eastern Donbas have faced physical insecurity due to fighting since 2014 but the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022 brought a far greater level of violence and destruction to those areas. Russian occupation authorities engage in torture of detainees and other abuses.

UNHCR reported in September 2024 that 11,973 civilians had been killed and 25,943 injured throughout all of Ukraine since the full-scale invasion began in February 2022, adding that Kherson and Donetsk were among the regions where civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure were concentrated.

Long-standing reports of abuse, sexual violence, and torture in prisons and detention centers have persisted. A 2023 report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine documented cases of Russian military members raping civilian women in the Kherson Region. Men are subject to sexual violence as well. In October 2024, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, a UN commission, concluded that "Russian authorities have committed torture in all provinces of Ukraine where areas came under Russian control." A 2023 OHCHR report said the UN body had documented "conflict-related sexual violence" by Russian authorities and penitentiary staff in Crimean prisons, and had heard credible accounts of "severe beatings" of Ukrainian civilian prisoners who had been transferred to Crimea. A December report released by the OHCHR described evidence of dozens of executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war by Russian military forces, as well as their torture and ill treatment, including sexual abuse.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of 0 / various segments of the population? 4

Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars are persecuted by occupation authorities. There are no provisions to protect other ethnic minority groups, such as Greeks, Bulgarians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, from discrimination. Russia's deeply flawed legal system offers little recourse for women facing gender-based discrimination. In November 2023 the "international LGBT public movement" was deemed an extremist organization by the Russian Supreme Court, forcing LGBT+ people and those who would advocate for their rights underground.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability 0 / to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4

Free movement is severely restricted throughout the occupied areas.

After the February 2022 invasion began, it became almost impossible to travel directly from Crimea to government-controlled Ukraine due to ongoing hostilities, and officials were empowered to forcibly relocate some residents and limit travel to and from the peninsula.

It is possible to leave the occupied part of Kherson Region only through other occupied territories: Crimea or Donetsk Region. When leaving through Russian military checkpoints, civilians must undergo "filtration." During filtration, civilians are interrogated, and psychological pressure and physical and sexual abuse has been documented by rights groups and independent investigations. Families, including parents and children, are often separated during the filtration process. Some people have gone missing after being filtered or have been imprisoned on charges including espionage. In addition, there is a practice in Kherson of forced deportation of civilians to Russia or to territory controlled by Ukraine, and a nighttime curfew during which civilians are prohibited from leaving their homes.

In occupied eastern territories, direct travel into territory controlled by Kyiv is practically impossible due to the war.

Zaporizhzhia's Russian-installed governor, Yevgeny Balitsky, said in February 2024 that "entire families" had been expelled for not backing the occupying authorities. A UN report released in August also documented deportations by Russian authorities to Russia and third countries of those who refused to cooperate with the occupation.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 0 / 4

Property rights are poorly protected, and the Russian occupation has resulted in a redistribution of assets in favor of Russian and pro-Russian entities. A Russian passport is required to prove property ownership, and Russian authorities have engaged in a repressive campaign to impose Russian passports on the population.

The properties of Crimean Tatars who returned in the 1990s—after the Soviet-era mass deportation—and built houses without permits are vulnerable to seizure by Russian authorities. In October 2022, a Russian decree authorized the seizure of private property in Crimea for military purposes. In 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) recognized that there had been a “systemic campaign of large-scale expropriation/nationalization of property belonging to civilians and private enterprises in Crimea” featuring “conclusive transfer of ownership without compensation.”

The property of deported Ukrainians is transferred to the Russian army or the occupation authorities. Laws enacted in 2023 and 2024 in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia require owners to prove property ownership to occupation authorities, sometimes in person, or risk seizure. Other recent measures allow authorities wide authority to declare property “unused” and seize it.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 1 / 4

Domestic violence remains a serious problem throughout the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories, and Russian laws do not offer strong protections. In 2017, Putin signed legislation that partly decriminalized domestic abuse in Russia, prescribing only small fines and short administrative detention for acts that do not cause serious injuries.

Russian law does not recognize same-sex marriage or civil unions and prohibits changing a person’s sex and gender in public records and via medical procedures, with a narrow exception for congenital anomalies. In November 2023, the Russian Supreme Court ruled that the “international LGBT public movement” was an extremist organization, with any related participation or financing punishable by up to 12 years in prison. Rights groups report that almost all LGBT+ individuals have long since fled the occupied areas, and those who remain do not openly or visibly express their identity.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from 0 / economic exploitation? 4

Economic opportunity has been limited by a variety of factors in the occupied territories, including restrictive laws and practices of the Russian occupation forces, violent conflict, international sanctions, the collapse of key industries, and the concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of Russian and local pro-Russian elites. Migrant workers, women, and children are vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of forced labor or sexual exploitation.

In Crimea, economic opportunity is has been limited since the 2014 occupation due to international sanctions, restrictions on trade via mainland Ukraine, and reliance on trade with Russia. Residents' access to goods and services remains constrained, and vital industries like tourism and agriculture have stagnated. Russian occupation forces began conscripting Crimea residents into the Russian military long before the 2022 full-scale invasion, and the process has escalated since then. Ukrainian authorities said in December 2024 that more than 50,000 Crimean residents had been conscripted since 2014. Thousands of children from the occupied Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kherson have been systematically transferred to summer camps in Crimea, where they are forced to participate in training and indoctrination activities meant to prepare them for future service in the Russian military.

In the occupied Kherson region, women are victims of sexual exploitation by the Russian military. Farmers and agricultural workers are forced to work under pressure from the Russian military to ensure the export of grain and other agricultural products to Russia. In the occupied territory of Kherson Region, state and commercial property has been seized by the Russian army. Russian authorities have exported grain and construction and agricultural machinery to Crimea and Russia. RFE/RL reported in June 2024 that Russian companies exported about 34,000 tons of Ukrainian grain abroad the previous year. In fishing villages in Kherson, the Russian military has confiscated large catches and taken them to Russia. Saldo, the occupation governor of Kherson, has pressured local businesses and in 2024 was accused by Ukrainian prosecutors of personally stealing 3,000 tons of grain.

Associated documents

Document ID 2125457 Related / Associated

2025 | [Freedom House](#) (Author)

Ukraine

Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2024

ecoi.net description:

Russian-occupied territories in Ukraine: Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2024

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