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Human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1. The present report is issued pursuant to the Ministers' Deputies' decisions¹ CM/Del/Dec(2023)1477/2.4 and CM/Del/Dec(2024)1500/2.5, inviting the Secretary General to report on a regular basis, at least once a year, on the human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation, using all available sources of information, so as to further provide the Committee of Ministers with a basis for an assessment of the situation and possible decisions on action.

2. A Secretariat delegation conducted a working visit to Warsaw, Poland, and Kyiv, Ukraine, during 1-4 April 2025. The report draws on meetings and discussions with the Ukrainian authorities, international organisations, human rights defenders and civil society activists, information obtained by relevant Council of Europe bodies, as well as information available in the public domain. The Secretary General visited Ukraine on 4-6 December 2024 for high-level meetings touching upon issues that form the subject of the present report. The Secretary General wishes to express his gratitude to the Ukrainian authorities for their support in organising the visits and to all interlocutors for their assistance and valuable contributions.

3. Because of the Russian Federation's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and cessation of its Council of Europe membership, meaningful discussions with the Russian government on the relevant issues at stake, including access, could not be pursued. Impossibility of physical access for Council of Europe and other international human rights organisations to the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation creates significant obstacles to monitoring the human rights situation, verifying facts on the ground, and establishing direct contacts with victims of human rights violations. Furthermore, international organisations and Ukrainian human rights defenders reported a general deterioration with regard to access to information. In the face of such challenges, Ukraine's Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights has taken further steps to monitor the situation including through a Special Report issued in March 2025.

4. The present report focuses primarily on human rights issues from a European Convention on Human Rights (hereinafter the Convention) standpoint, as outlined in relevant Committee of Ministers' decisions. The timeframe under review covers the one-year period from March 2024 to March 2025.² To this end, the report informs about several well-documented patterns and representative cases of human rights violations in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation (*rationae territoriae*).³ While those have been reflected to the extent possible, the report does not purport to provide an exhaustive account of the human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

5. The report does not replace the monitoring procedures established in the Council of Europe. It is recalled that currently Council of Europe mechanisms lack unhindered physical access to the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

¹ Decisions adopted respectively at the 1477th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, on 4 October 2023, and 1500th meeting on 5 and 10 June 2024.

² Some of the information provided at the time of the visit concerned developments from early April 2025

³ The exact delineation of territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation is based on the list of Ukraine's Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories from December 2022. The list is periodically amended to reflect the situation on the ground.

6. Furthermore, the report should not be seen as prejudging any possible decisions in the cases pending before the European Court of Human Rights which remains competent to deal with alleged violations of the Convention that occurred before 16 September 2022.

7. The European Court of Human Rights has recognised the application of the Convention both during peacetime and in situations of international armed conflict and occupation.⁴ The report relies notably on the principle of “effective control over the territory” as well as on the interplay between international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) in times of international armed conflict and occupation as reflected in the Court’s judgment in the inter-state case *Ukraine v. Russia (re Crimea)* (application nos. 20958/14 and 38334/18 Grand Chamber judgment of 25 June 2024). From this perspective the report follows the principle that both these international law frameworks pursue the common goal of protecting the dignity and integrity of the person and can be mutually reinforcing whereas rules of IHL may be relevant for the interpretation and application of IHRL in specific situations.

8. Nothing in this report should be seen as an infringement of the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within internationally recognised borders, extending to its territorial waters. The Council of Europe fully respects the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine as repeatedly reaffirmed by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly.

Relevant cases before the European Court of Human Rights

9. It is recalled that whereas the Russian Federation ceased to be a party to the Convention on 16 September 2022, the latter remains applicable before this date.

10. On 25 June 2024, the Grand Chamber of the Court delivered a judgment in the inter-state case *Ukraine v. Russia (re Crimea)* (application nos. 20958/14 and 38334/18). The Grand Chamber confirmed that the Russian Federation had exercised effective “control” over the territory of the Crimean Peninsula at the period under examination of the Court. In this context it found numerous violations stemming from the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, constituting “administrative practices”. The question of just satisfaction under Article 41 of the Convention was reserved for further examination. The Grand Chamber furthermore held that Russia must take every measure to secure, as soon as possible, the safe return of the relevant prisoners transferred from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol to penal facilities located on the territory of the Russian Federation.

⁴ Under the Geneva Conventions system, the situation in Ukraine is an international armed conflict. See Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, “Report to the United Nations General Assembly” (A/78/540), 19 October 2023. The Commission has also found reasonable grounds to conclude that the invasion and attacks by the armed forces of the Russian Federation against the territory and armed forces of Ukraine qualify as acts of aggression against Ukraine. See Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, “Report to the Human Rights Council” (A/HRC/52/62), 15 March 2023.

11. The Committee of Ministers first examined this case at their 1521st meeting (DH) on 4-6 March 2025.⁵ No information was submitted by the Russian Federation.⁶ In its decision, the Committee recalled that the Russian Federation remained bound by the obligation to implement judgments of the European Court. The Committee of Ministers urged the Russian authorities to take specific measures to secure the safe return of the prisoners transferred from Crimea to penal facilities located on the territory of the Russian Federation and strongly insisted that the Russian authorities immediately restore the application in Crimea of “the whole of the law” of Ukraine. It further urged the Russian authorities to immediately release, and ensure the safe return to the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian authorities, of all Ukrainian political prisoners affected by the administrative practice in Crimea and of all illegally detained Ukrainian soldiers, ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and journalists. It also called on Russian authorities to immediately cease all forms of torture and ill-treatment and ensure access of these prisoners to independent legal advice, medical treatment and communication with their families and outside world; allow independent international bodies to monitor their state of health and conditions of detention; to immediately cease all transfers of prisoners from Crimea to Russian Federation territory; as well as to take a number of other specific measures set out in the decision. The Committee of Ministers invited the authorities of member States to explore all possible means to ensure execution of this judgment, with a view to ensuring accountability for the serious breaches of international law established in it.

12. Of the remaining three inter-State cases, *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia* (applications nos. 8019/16, 43800/14, 28525/20 and 11055/22) is currently under examination by the Grand Chamber⁷. It concerns the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014, the alleged abduction of three groups of children and their transfer to Russia, the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, and Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine. It is recalled that in its admissibility decision, the Grand Chamber established that since 11 May 2014, Russia exercised effective control over the relevant parts of eastern Ukraine. In June 2024, the Court held a hearing in this case, in which 26 member states intervened as third parties.

13. As of February 2025, there were over 9 000 individual applications concerning the different situations falling within the scope of the above-mentioned inter-state cases. The interim measures indicated by the Court in individual applications concerning the Russian Federation’s war against Ukraine since February 2022 are still pending in 57 cases. These applications mainly concern Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) held in Russian captivity. Since 1 June 2024 to date, the Court has lifted the interim measures in 19 applications following the information provided to the Court which showed that the POWs and civilians had either been released from captivity or their bodies had been returned to Ukraine.

⁵ CM/Del/Dec(2025)1521/H46-29.

⁶ Three Rule 9 submissions were received from: Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre; Protection for Prisoners of Ukraine, Russland hinter Gittern e.V. (“Russia Incarcerated”) and the European Prison Litigation Network; and Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Center for Civil Liberties, Regional Center for Human Rights and Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, all summarised in the document [H-Exec\(2025\)3](#).

⁷ The judgment will be delivered on 9 July 2025.

II. BACKGROUND

14. On 24 February 2025, Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine entered its fourth consecutive year. The number of civilian casualties, including among women and children, has continued to rise with losses spiking in recent months due to intensive Russian air attacks. As of March 2025, according to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) 12 910 civilians had lost their lives and 30 700 were injured however the actual extent of civilian harm is believed to be considerably greater.⁸ The demographic shifts dictated by Russia's war of aggression have further consolidated: as of March 2025, 6.93 million Ukrainian citizens were registered as displaced outside the country, 4.6 million people remained internally displaced, with nearly half belonging to vulnerable groups including children, elderly and people with disabilities. The immense damage to civilian and critical infrastructure but also the broader socio-economic, humanitarian and psychological harm remain to be addressed as part of a comprehensive reconstruction process.

15. During the period under review, the Russian Federation sought to further solidify its control over the temporarily occupied parts of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine – following their illegal annexation in September 2022, in addition to the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol – in violation of its obligations as an Occupying Power. Grave human rights abuses continued to be perpetrated by the Russian occupying authorities in a systematic and widespread manner. New legislation and policies were introduced to coerce the local population into cooperation with the occupying authorities, while significantly increasing the risk that they are further uprooted and dispossessed.

16. Although the period under review has witnessed a reactivation of diplomatic efforts, armed hostilities have continued unabated. Despite several agreements reached with US mediation,⁹ a full and tenable ceasefire remains to be achieved. Notably, Ukraine's declared readiness to accept an immediate interim and extendable 30-day comprehensive ceasefire based on a US proposal and supported by the EU has not been reciprocated by Russia.¹⁰

⁸ Of the total number of recorded casualties by HRMMU, 36 599 occurred in Ukraine-controlled territories and 7 011 in territories of Ukraine temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation. See OHCHR, "Ukraine: Protection of civilians in armed conflict - March 2025 Update", 9 April 2025.

⁹ As part of its mediation, the United States reached bilateral agreements at the presidential level with both Ukraine and Russia to ban strikes against energy facilities for a period of 30 days. Subsequently, technical talks held separately by the US with Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Saudi Arabia on 23-25 March, produced agreements to develop measures for implementing the energy ceasefire and ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force, and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea.

¹⁰ Joint Statement of Ukrainian and American delegations following their meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

17. On 24 February 2025, marking the three-year period since the start of the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, the UN General Assembly adopted two resolutions condemning the Russian Federation's war of aggression and calling for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in line with the United Nations Charter.¹¹ Both resolutions ultimately reflected the constant position of the international community in recognising the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within the internationally recognised borders as stipulated in UN General Assembly resolutions since 2014.¹² On the same day, the UN Security Council adopted a US-sponsored draft resolution – its first ever since the start of Russia's full-scale military invasion – calling for a swift end to the conflict and urged a lasting peace between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.¹³ At the same time, the debates exposed the poignant challenges of achieving a just, and lasting peace in line with the UN Charter amidst ongoing geopolitical shifts.

18. In this light, calls and initiatives have been made for the peace process to address the serious humanitarian and human rights consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In particular, the plight of POWs, civilian detainees and forcibly transferred or unlawfully detained children has consistently emerged as a salient question as illustrated by the Summit on Peace in Ukraine held in Bürgenstock, Switzerland, on 15-16 June 2024, and the follow up high-level international conference in Montreal, Canada, 31 October, 1 November 2024. Most recently, on 11 March 2025, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights outlined ten elements for such an approach which comprise upholding the human rights of people in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.¹⁴

III. HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ARMED CONFLICT

Right to life

19. The right to life is a basic human right and is enshrined in Article 2 of the Convention, which ranks as one of its most fundamental provisions. It comprises two substantive obligations: the general obligation to protect the right to life and the prohibition of intentional deprivation of life. Having regard to its fundamental character, Article 2 also contains a procedural obligation to carry out an effective investigation into alleged breaches of its substantive limb. This includes cases where a person has disappeared in life-threatening circumstances. In situations of international armed conflict, those safeguards continue to apply, albeit interpreted against the background of the provisions of international humanitarian law.¹⁵

20. Russian occupying authorities and forces continued to engage in conduct that resulted in potentially unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of life. The incidents reviewed by the Secretariat occurred in several types of recurring situations: prohibited warfare methods, the execution of POWs and wounded Ukrainian soldiers, as well as death following enforced disappearance, often as a result of torture inflicted on the victim.

¹¹ Resolution A/ES-11/L.10 "Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine" adopted by a recorded vote of 93 in favour to 18 against, with 65 abstentions and A/ES-11/L.11 "The path to peace" adopted by a recorded vote of 93 in favour to 8 against with 73 abstentions.

¹² See UNGA resolution 68/262 adopted on 27 March 2014.

¹³ UNSC Resolution S/RES/2774(2025) adopted by a vote of 10 in favour to none against, with five abstentions.

¹⁴ The elements also comprise accountability, redress/reparations for victims, prisoners, children and missing persons, IDPs and refugees, transitioning out from martial law, reconstruction, EU accession, role of women, involvement of actors.

¹⁵ European Court of Human Rights: Guide on Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, updated on 31 August 2022.

21. Ukraine-controlled areas near the frontline reportedly accounted for the majority of verified civilian casualties due to frequent Russian attacks with explosive wide impact weapons including aerial strikes, shelling and exposure to mines. Major Ukrainian cities such as Kherson and Kharkiv close to the frontline have been subjected to almost daily attacks. In one deadly incident, six civilians were killed reportedly following the shelling by Russian armed forces of the Kherson city market on 1 October 2024.

22. The escalation of the UAV warfare and particularly first-person view (FPV) drones has also emerged as a serious life threat not only for civilians but also for first responders, medical and humanitarian workers alike. The Secretariat's interlocutors in Kyiv referred in particular to the high number of FPVs attacks by the Russian military in the city of Kherson. The HRMMU also documented multiple attacks and rising casualties among such groups. On 12 September 2024, ICRC vehicles were shelled in the Ukraine-controlled Viroliubivka in the Donetsk region, resulting in three humanitarian workers killed. The occurrence of so-called "double-tap" strikes on medical staff, attacks against clearly marked humanitarian vehicles as well as massive use of camera-equipped FPV drones has raised concerns of deliberate attacks.¹⁶ Civilian casualties from short-range drone attacks have also been reported in the temporarily occupied territories – in one reported episode on 5 October 2024, a bus was hit by a drone in Horlivka injuring six civilian passengers.¹⁷

23. The period under review witnessed a sharp rise in the number of reported executions or wounding of Ukrainian POWs by Russian military in violation of international law. On 24 March 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported to the UN Human Rights Council that his Office had recorded 27 such incidents involving 84 Ukrainian soldiers since August 2024 in multiple locations.¹⁸ In other incidents, gruesome acts were allegedly committed on the dead bodies of Ukrainian soldiers. The dissemination of corresponding footage has also significantly increased allowing for geolocation of incidents, for example in the Donetsk region in August and October 2024.¹⁹ Testimonies of former Russian soldiers who had deserted and were interviewed by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine revealed that some of them had received direct orders from their command not to take prisoners ("no quarter will be given") or even to execute them during combat operations which constitutes a war crime.²⁰ In addition, the Commission found that both parties committed war crimes by killing severely injured soldiers of the other side, who were thus *hors de combat*, including by dropping explosive ordnance of short-range drones – such acts have often been accompanied by circulation of dehumanising footage.²¹

¹⁶ OHCHR, "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 September – 30 November 2024", p.8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Türk: Ukraine needs peace based on human rights. Statement delivered at the 58th session of the Human Rights Council, on 28 March 2025. At the same time, it should be noted that these figures include cases in other sectors of the frontline outside the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. A number of cases have been reported in the context of armed hostilities in the Kursk region of the Russian Federation. Some interlocutors met by the delegation in Kyiv contended that the sharp increase in reported cases of execution of Ukrainian POWs coincided with Ukraine's incursion into the Russian Federation.

¹⁹ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine to the Human Rights Council, 11 March 2025, A/HRC/58/67, p. 13.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p.14.

24. Death of POWs and civilians in custody constituted a recurrent pattern. Between 1 March 2023 and 31 August 2024, OHCHR documented the death of ten Ukrainian POWs and one retained medical personnel (all men) in places of internment, as a result of torture, poor conditions of internment, or inadequate medical attention.²² As regards civilians, death in custody followed their reported enforced disappearance in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine as illustrated by at least two prominent cases. In one case, the body of the mayor of the temporarily occupied Dniproprudne in the Zaporizhzhia region who was detained on 13 March 2022 for allegedly refusing to cooperate with the Russian military was returned during an exchange on 4 December 2024. There were strong allegations that the victims in such cases were subjected to torture.

Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

25. The prohibition of torture and ill-treatment is one of the most fundamental international human rights law norms enshrined in Article 3 of the Convention and provides for no exceptions under any circumstances. Together with Article 2, it is considered a peremptory norm which reflects one of the basic values of democratic societies. The procedural obligation under Article 3 continues to apply in difficult security conditions, including in a context of armed conflict.²³ According to the European Court of Human Rights, rape in custody can constitute torture and gives rise to positive obligations under Article 3.²⁴ Torture and ill-treatment committed during the armed conflict may constitute war crimes and they may constitute crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack, with knowledge of the attack, directed against a civilian population.

26. The recurrence of torture in the context of occupation continued to be widespread and systematic.²⁵ Accounts of survivors and witnesses provided to the Council of Europe bodies,²⁶ Ukrainian authorities as well as international human rights monitors, and human rights defenders, testify to the prevalence of torture in all stages of detention in both unofficial and official facilities. A wide “arsenal” of methods to inflict physical and psychological harm such as beatings, stress positions, strangulation, hanging, electrocution, death threats and mock executions along with harsh and inhumane detention conditions has been documented based on testimonies. In some cases, individuals, notably POWs, were reportedly tortured in multiple locations, during transfers from one facility to another and sometimes over prolonged periods of time. A list of facilities in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and in the territory of the Russian Federation where Ukrainian POWs and civilians were allegedly detained and tortured was made available to the Secretariat. Ukrainian authorities raised strong concerns about the allegations of torture and ill-treatment of the Ukrainian staff in the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).

²² OHCHR, 40th Periodic Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: Treatment of prisoners of war and update on the human rights situation (1 June to 31 August 2024), 1 October 2024, p.10.

²³ European Court of Human Rights: Guide on Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, updated on 31 August 2022. See also *Georgia v. Russia* (III), (Appl. no. 38263/08), judgment of 21 January 2021.

²⁴ See case of *Maslova and Nalbandov v. Russia*, (Appl. no. 839/02), judgment of 24 January 2008.

²⁵ According to the information provided by the Verkhovna Rada Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights, since February 24, 2022, law enforcement agencies have registered more than 1 720 criminal offenses based on facts of torture or ill-treatment. Over 3 800 civilians and 2 200 POWs have already been recognised as victims of torture and inhumane treatment.

²⁶ Joint hearing on Ukrainian prisoners of war, journalists and other civilians held in captivity by the Russian Federation of the Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons and Committee of Culture, Science and Media, on 30 January 2025.

27. Sexual violence was consistently and deliberately used as a form of torture with an intent of punishment and humiliation. Of the 42 former POWs interviewed by the HRMMU during September-November 2024, 32 reported being subjected to various forms of sexual violence including rape. In one incident, women POWs recounted how they were taken out of cells, blindfolded, nudity imposed and forced to march while being told they would be executed as they were taken to a shower room. Nine out of 18 released civilians interviewed during the same period were subjected to sexual violence. In addition to the grave physical impact, sexual violence has also caused deep psychological trauma preventing victims from reintegrating in their families and the society.

28. Some of the harshest acts of torture appear to have been committed upon the arrival of detainees (so-called “admissions”) as well as during interrogations including with the aim to extract information, coerce the victims into confessions, self-incrimination or false testimony. While the significant role of the federal security service in ordering or directly perpetrating torture has been noted, the involvement of members of the federal penitentiary service, the Investigative Committee as well as the Russian military has been established. Based on its investigations, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has concluded that torture has been used by the Russian authorities pursuant to a coordinated policy with the aim of consolidating control over the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, constituting crimes against humanity.²⁷

29. Conversely, torture and ill-treatment allegations were reportedly disregarded by Russian courts. Despite the obligation to order an investigation, judges often directed lawyers to address the Investigative Committee of Russian Federation to no avail.

30. Lack of access to medical care in detention has been widely reported including as a consequence of its denial by the Russian authorities. Concerns persisted with regard to 64 individuals from Crimea detained or sentenced on allegedly politically orchestrated criminal cases, the majority of whom suffer from health issues with some remaining in need of urgent medical care.

Right to liberty and security

31. The Convention guarantees the right to liberty and security to everyone. The authorities have an obligation to ensure that any detention is lawful based on a procedure prescribed by law and to ensure Convention compliant conditions of detention. As regards detention taking place during an international armed conflict, the safeguards under Article 5 of the Convention must be interpreted and applied taking into account the context and the provisions of international humanitarian law.²⁸

²⁷ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/58/67, pp.10-11.

²⁸ See for example, Grand Chamber judgment *Hassan v. the United Kingdom* (Application no. 29750/09), 16 September 2014.

32. Russian occupying authorities continued to arbitrarily detain Ukrainian civilians without lawful grounds or procedural guarantees under IHRL or IHL thus depriving them of their protected status in an armed conflict. In cases when civilians were held *incommunicado* for indefinite periods of time and without formal charges, they were subjected to torture and ill-treatment, forced labour and even death in custody. In this light, grave concerns persist over the current status and fate of potentially many thousands of Ukrainian civilians including journalists, local officials, law enforcement personnel, former military or their relatives, activists and other persons with pro-Ukrainian views who remain detained or are considered missing.²⁹ According to ODIHR, during the second half of 2024, the Russian authorities appear to have increased the practice of prosecuting and convicting civilians on trumped-up charges after their prolonged arbitrary detention.³⁰

33. In one emblematic case which testifies to the ordeals of victims, Viktoriia Roshchyna, a young journalist who had earlier covered the Russian armed attack on Mariupol as well as civilians and detention cases reportedly died in Russian custody in September 2024.³¹ Despite her reported disappearance in the temporarily occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region in August 2023, the Russian Ministry of Defence finally acknowledged detention in response to appeals from her family but failed to provide other information and her whereabouts remained unknown. In February 2025, her unidentified body was repatriated with several missing organs as part of an exchange between Ukraine and Russia. An international journalist investigation later concluded that she was held in confinement in the temporarily occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region and eventually transferred to the Taganrog pre-trial detention facility, in the Rostov region, in the Russian Federation, where many Ukrainian POWs are held.³² The investigation alleged that she was almost certainly tortured. At the time of the report's writing, Russian authorities failed to provide an official account of the circumstances of her death.

34. Russian authorities including at the federal level systematically failed to disclose information about detained civilians leaving the families in despair over the fate of their loved ones. In a number of cases when competent Russian bodies, notably the Russian Ministry of Defence acknowledged the fact of detention, no information was provided regarding the whereabouts on the grounds of confidentiality. The scarcity of information provided by Russian authorities was compounded by the obstruction of access for human rights organisations to the detention places in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and the Russian Federation exacerbating the state of insecurity and uncertainty of detainees.

²⁹ According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights situation in the Russian Federation, as of 2 August 2024, at least 1 672 Ukrainian civilians were known to have been arbitrarily detained by the Russian authorities. They were kept in at least 186 locations, including 89 in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, six in Belarus and 91 in the territory of the Russian Federation, in penal colonies, pretrial detention centres and temporary makeshift tent camps. In addition, 14 000 Ukrainian civilians are missing. As of the end of August 2024, the office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine had initiated more than 4 000 criminal proceedings regarding the illegal detention of almost 15 000 Ukrainians in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

³⁰ ODIHR, Sixth Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine, 13 December 2024, p. 20.

³¹ Per announcement of Russian authorities to the victim's family.

³² See Forbidden Stories: Russia's 'Ghost Detainees': The Investigation That Cost Viktoriia Roshchyna Her Life, last accessed on 11 May 2025.

35. According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, Russian authorities committed enforced disappearances as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population, pursuant to a coordinated policy, which amounts to a crime against humanity.³³

36. In Crimea, the Russian occupying authorities continued to arbitrarily detain individuals displaying pro-Ukrainian positions as well as Crimean Tatars purportedly for infringing Russia's anti-extremist and anti-terrorist legislation, for discrediting the Russian army as well as other spurious charges. The cases of individuals unlawfully detained in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions and forcibly transferred further to the Crimean Peninsula since 2022 continued to solicit further attention. The Ukrainian authorities were aware of 86 civilians who remained in detention facilities (SIZO) in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, many still without formal charges – yet others awaiting trial.

37. During the reporting period, the Russian occupying authorities continued to deport civilians deprived of their liberty to detention facilities in the Russian Federation, including in remote regions in a recurrent pattern of violation of IHL. Over 2 000 individuals are known to have been deported.³⁴ The Secretariat was informed of numerous cases of civilians alongside POWs being relocated to Russia's remote Altay region (4 000 km from Ukraine) during November-December 2024, following their conviction. This significantly restricted the ability of not only family members but also lawyers to visit them.

38. In this context, with the support of third parties, the Ukrainian and Russian ombudsperson have ensured a channel to facilitate the release of prisoners of war and detained civilians, handing over the bodies of the fallen soldiers and the return of children as well as for information-sharing purposes. On 8 November 2024, a meeting between the two Ombudspersons took place in Minsk (Belarus). In this context, a new initiative was introduced aimed at facilitating the exchange of letter from families to POWs. A second meeting was held on 20 December 2024 and similarly saw the sides exchange parcels and letters for POWs, verify and hand over lists as well as repatriate bodies of the fallen. In the most recent developments, on 16 May 2025, following the first direct talks in years between the Russian Federation and Ukraine held in Istanbul, the two sides reportedly agreed to swap 1 000 POWs each.

³³ Echoing its findings on perpetration of torture, the Commission concluded that the widespread and systematic nature of the enforced disappearances; the sequenced involvement of various entities of the Russian Federation allocating and directing resources and efforts to detain large numbers of civilians in various facilities for prolonged periods of time; the provision of standard responses to families, which systematically failed to communicate the fate or whereabouts of those disappeared during the three years of the armed conflict, point to a coordinated state policy. The failure to disclose the whereabouts of the victims further shows the intention of the Russian authorities to deprive them of the protection of the law.

³⁴ UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Situation in the Russian Federation, op. cit. p. 16.

39. During the visit, the delegation's attention was also drawn to the situation of Ukrainian prisoners who had served their sentences in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. While they were in principle subject to deportation to Ukraine, in practice this had proved impossible due to loss of identity documents. They were consequently detained immediately after their release and held for prolonged periods in migrant custody centres in the Russian Federation.³⁵ Ukrainian NGOs met by the delegation reported being aware of at least 100 individuals in a limbo state but the numbers could be higher. They expressed concerns that there were no legal avenues on how to repatriate them while requesting assistance in this respect. It was however reported that deportation to a third country in the South Caucasus had been possible in at least two cases in 2024.

Right to a fair trial

40. The right to a fair trial includes a specific set of minimum rights to be ensured to persons charged with criminal offences. It also comprises the right to an impartial and independent tribunal.³⁶

41. During the period under review, the Russian court system in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine, became fully operational. In addition to constituting a breach of Russia's obligations as an occupying power, the Grand Chamber has found in the inter-state case *Ukraine v. Russia* (re Crimea) (application nos. 20958/14 and 38334/18, Grand Chamber judgment of 25 June 2024) that the extension and application of Russia's law to Crimea is in contravention of the Convention, as interpreted in the light of IHL. It has concluded that Russian law could not be regarded as "law" within the meaning of the Convention and that any administrative practice based on that law could not be regarded as "lawful" or "in accordance with the law".

42. As previously reported, the continued application of Russian legislation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine resulted in prosecutions and convictions of Ukrainian citizens for actions that would otherwise be lawful under Ukrainian law; including for alleged violation of the Russian Federation's legislation on the fight against extremism, public assemblies, and freedom of expression, as well as treason.

43. Violations of the right to fair trial in the newly occupied territories continued to arise in connection with the criminal prosecution of Ukrainian POWs. In particular, captured personnel of 12th Special Forces Brigade Azov of the National Guard of Ukraine or the "Noman Çelebicihan" battalion of the Armed Forces of Ukraine which have been banned as extremist/terrorist organisations in the Russian Federation were reportedly prosecuted and convicted for their participation as combatants in such units under the respective Russian laws. Courts in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation also consistently meted out lengthy sentences to members of these military units. In other cases, Ukrainian POWs were reportedly convicted on charges of war crimes, including torture and ill-treatment, espionage or attempt to seize state power. POWs who were later released as part of exchanges recounted being convicted in spite of having endured torture and other forms of intimidation with the aim of extracting confessions, testimony and self-incrimination for crimes they had not committed.

³⁵ Previously such individuals were reportedly able to reach Ukraine through a humanitarian crossing point in Ukraine's Sumy region which has been closed.

³⁶ See Guide on Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Right to Fair Trial (criminal limb), updated on 31 August 2022.

44. On 12 July 2024, a court in the temporarily occupied Donetsk city of Ukraine sentenced a former staff member of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine to 14 years in a strict-regime penal colony on espionage charges. The trial was held behind closed doors. His conviction followed that of two other OSCE SMM former personnel in 2022. OSCE described their treatment as “unjust” and “inhumane” and called for their immediate release. Notwithstanding, in March 2025, two of them were transferred to penal colonies in the Russian Federation. In another case, on 13 February 2025, a female student from Kherson was sentenced to 10 years in a penal colony on espionage charges allegedly for conducting reconnaissance at the behest of Ukrainian armed forces. Before appearing at trial, she was reportedly held for two years in a remand facility in the temporarily occupied city of Simferopol, in Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea (see above) without formal charges while being deprived of access by her family and lawyer, casting doubts on the lawfulness of the accusations and proceedings.

45. Generally, Ukrainian human rights defenders reported a growing number of criminal cases against civilians on charges of “espionage”, “treason” and “sabotage”. According to them, 52 such cases were pending before courts in the temporarily occupied Crimea alone since the start of Russia’s full-scale military invasion in February 2022, in a staggering increase from only seven such type proceedings documented during the period 2014-2022. In addition, the Russian occupying authorities in the Crimean Peninsula denied the defendants due process rights in extremism or terrorism-related cases. According to the Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea/Office of the Crimea Platform, a total of 225 individuals have been prosecuted or sentenced on trumped-up cases for allegedly political and religious motives compared to around 200 at the time of the previous report. Among them are indigenous Crimean Tatar people, Ukrainian activists, journalists, and bloggers, as well as members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

46. The delegation observed that the right to a defence lawyer remained overall significantly restricted. As previously mentioned, Russian authorities systematically denied access to lawyers to persons unlawfully or arbitrarily deprived of their liberty. In addition, lawyers refrained from taking up cases which were seen as “challenging” the Russian occupying authorities. In cases where Ukrainian POWs were accorded legal aid in proceedings, some lawyers had not shown interest in defending them and failed to visit them in internment or pressured them to sign self-incrimination confessions.³⁷ In the temporarily occupied Crimea, pressure was documented on lawyers and human rights defenders representing defendants in allegedly selective prosecutions and trials. According to Ukrainian NGOs, among the 12 lawyers who were regularly involved in such proceedings, four were disbarred, four were subjected to administrative arrests, three to detention and administrative fines, and one was criminally prosecuted. On 7 November 2024, the home of two prominent Crimean Tatar human rights defenders and members of the Crimean Tatar Solidarity movement were raided by the counter-extremist centre. Their phones and other personal items were seized and one of them was later charged with an administrative offence in relation to two social media posts.³⁸

³⁷ OHCHR, “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 September – 30 November 2024”, p.13.

³⁸ See ZMINA, 7 November 2025.

IV. PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION

Consequences of extending Russian citizenship

47. The Russian Federation continued to effectively impose Russian citizenship in continued violation of applicable norms of international law. The Russian Ministry of Interior has claimed that over 3.4 million passports were issued as of September 2024 in the parts of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation,³⁹ however the figure could not be verified. At the same time, the transition period which provided for a simplified acquisition of the Russian passport was extended until 31 December 2024 and then terminated.

48. Pressure to change nationality increased during the reporting period. On 25 March 2025, a new Russian presidential decree was issued requiring all citizens of Ukraine in the Russian Federation to voluntarily leave the country unless they are granted legal residence by 10 September 2025. The decree would directly affect the Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine who have not acquired Russian citizenship, putting them at risk of potentially forceful deportation. Although in principle, opting for a residence/work permit, manifestly rejecting Russian nationality, risks being seen as a sign of disloyalty.

49. Failure to obtain Russian nationality negatively impacted the daily lives of the Ukrainian population. Ukrainian human rights defenders have raised concerns that pursuant to Russian presidential decrees, by effectively recognising Ukrainian nationals in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine as foreigners, individuals could be placed under surveillance/supervision of the Russian occupying authorities.⁴⁰ Access to a range of rights and benefits, including social services, education, healthcare and property is possible only with a Russian passport resulting in discrimination based on nationality. In other cases, reported to the Secretariat's delegation, defendants were promised shorter prison sentences if they would opt for Russian citizenship. At the same time, accepting Russian nationality also carried the risk of being conscripted to the military or being convicted on treason charges. In at least two such cases reported to the Secretariat by human rights defenders, Ukrainian nationals who obtained Russian citizenship lost it after being convicted of treason, were consequently deported and issued an entry ban.

³⁹ Comments by the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation as reported.

⁴⁰ See Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No.1126 dd 30 December 2024 "On temporary measures to regulate the legal status of certain categories of foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Russian Federation with regard to the application of the expulsion regime".

50. The Ukrainian authorities remain committed to continue providing access to social protection to the population in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The delegation was informed that pensions continued to be paid on government-controlled territory on the condition that no entitlements were received from the Russian state and upon identity verification. In cases when access to payments remained physically impossible in the temporarily occupation context, pensions rights were accrued. Regulations which required that payments of pensions be made via only one bank in the government-controlled territory and were therefore perceived as discriminatory were abolished in February 2025 and ID verification procedures were simplified. However, while social allowances, such as for lifelong disability, paid before 24 February 2022 are still accrued, payment of new entitlements is currently impossible due to the inability of the authorities to confirm eligibility.

51. During the visit in Kyiv, the Secretariat's attention was drawn to the situation of birth certificates for newborn children in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation. A steep drop in the number of parents applying to receive birth certificates in Ukrainian government-controlled territory has been reported which in turn rendered it difficult to confirm the Ukrainian nationality of children while increasing the risk of statelessness.⁴¹ The delegation's interlocutors advocated for legal amendments to institute an administrative procedure instead of the existing cumbersome court procedure which they described as an enormous burden for families.

Ukrainians, indigenous people and persons belonging to national minorities

52. Against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing full-scale military invasion, the Russian authorities promoted rhetoric, policies and measures purportedly directed at erasing Ukrainian identity, culture and language. In the public sphere, Russian senior politicians and state media continued to portray Ukraine as an anti-Russia project at the behest of the West. Furthermore, Russia's vague provisions of anti-extremism law and the law forbidding discreditation of the Russian army continue to be widely used as tools to prohibit the display of Ukrainian national symbols and songs. In July 2024, the Russian occupying authorities demolished a memorial to the victims of the Holodomor in the temporarily occupied city of Luhansk following similar incidents in other parts of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. In December 2024, the Russian President approved the new Strategy on Countering Extremism. The strategy identifies "Ukrainian nationalism" as a "form of extremism" and "extremism in Ukraine" as a threat to national security alongside other banned ideologies and tasks Russia's law enforcement authorities with countering it in particular in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, potentially exposing Ukrainians to the risk of reprisals.

⁴¹ According to data provided by Ukrainian NGOs at the time of the visit around 105 000 children were born in the occupied territories after 24 February 2022, of which 9 820 received Ukrainian documents.

53. In the Autonomous Republic of Crimea of Ukraine, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, indigenous Crimean Tatar people continued to face systematic repressions. Crimean Tatars affiliated to the Mejlis the self-governing body of the Crimean Tatar people, were viewed as an inconvenient group and selectively targeted with physical attacks, denial of their civic and political rights and other reprisals. Searches of homes and places of worship purportedly looking for extremist literature and symbols remained one of the most common patterns of intimidation. The Secretariat was provided with information about numerous such incidents during the period under review, including an early morning mass raid simultaneously in several areas in the northern part of the Crimean Peninsula on 5 February 2025, including on the family of one Crimean Tatar “political prisoner”. At least three individuals were detained as a result of the searches. Crimean Tatars also continued to represent the majority of “political prisoners” in the Crimean Peninsula in yet another indication that they are disproportionately affected by repressions.

54. The Russian Supreme Court’s ban of the Mejlis on extremism related grounds remained in force while its head and other prominent figures continued to face entry bans and/or criminal prosecution. On 28 June 2024, the First Deputy Head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People who had been serving his sentence in the Russian Federation was released as part of an exchange of POWs. In meetings with the delegation in Kyiv, the Mejlis leadership expressed concerns about the demographic shifts occurring under the pressure of the temporary occupation. According to them, at least 35 000 Crimean Tatars, accounting for 10% of the total population, has left the Crimean Peninsula.

55. The Russian Federation’s full-scale military invasion of Ukraine and the large-scale displacement associated with it appears to have adversely impacted multi-ethnic diversity. A large part of the Roma people from the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation were displaced to Zakarpattia, in western Ukraine. Those who remained in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine continued to face human rights violations, including killings, but also removal of children from families. Overall, however, information on Roma but also other minorities has remained scarce and difficult to verify.

Access to education, including in mother tongue, and cultural rights

56. The right to education is enshrined in Article 2 of Protocol 1 to the Convention and is considered indispensable in the furtherance of other human rights. According to the European Court of Human Rights, this article must be interpreted in harmony with other rules of international law. Most importantly it is closely linked with the right of everyone, including parents and children, “to respect for his private and family life”, “freedom of thought, conscience and religion”, and “freedom to receive and impart information and ideas”. In addition, Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 is also closely linked to Article 14 of the Convention and to the prohibition of discrimination.⁴²

57. Ukraine’s education system has suffered severe damage due to widespread destruction and damage. OHCHR documented at least 1 614 armed attacks on educational facilities since Russia’s full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. 71% of attacks affected those in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine, 24% in the territories temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, and 5% in areas of active combat. Besides infrastructure damage, related disruptions and limited access to education could lead to long-term consequences for children’s development.

⁴² See Guide to Article 2 of Protocol 1 to the Convention, last updated 31 August 2022.

58. In the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, the forceful transition to Russian Federation education standards contrary to applicable provisions of international law has affected approximately 600 000 children.⁴³ The primary consequence of such changes in the education system has been the effective stamping out of the Ukrainian language. For example, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, only 164 schoolchildren received instruction in Ukrainian in only one school in the current school year (in a drastic reduction from 12 694 in seven schools before the illegal annexation) amounting to discrimination.⁴⁴ While information regarding other temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine remains insufficient, it would appear that schoolchildren in the temporarily occupied parts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions have limited access to the study of the Ukrainian language as a separate subject in early grades with the trend pointing towards a further decline.⁴⁵ In meetings with the Secretariat, Ukrainian human rights defenders expressed serious doubts that without access to adequate curriculum, textbooks and qualified professionals teaching in/of the Ukrainian language was at all possible.

59. Indoctrination of Ukrainian children and the militarism-focused agenda in both formal and informal education intensified. In the course of 2024 alone, several important changes were made at the curricular, policy and legal level aimed at fostering loyalty to the Russian state. Amendments to the federal law on education were enacted under which teachers must carry out education activities based on “Russian traditional and moral values”. As of the 2024-2025 school year, a new subject “Fundamentals of security and defence of homeland” was introduced in grades 8-12 with a view to strengthening military training, including handling of light weapons, and preparing children for future military service. In the same spirit, schools also served as platforms for the so-called “cadet classes” aimed at preparing children for service in law enforcement and the military, run under the patronage of respective institutions.⁴⁶ A massive number of children continued to be sent to recreational summer camps situated in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea of Ukraine and in the Russian Federation where they participated in activities promoting pro-Russian re-education.

60. State-led youth organisations such as *Movement of the First, Young Army (Iunarmia)* or *Voin* have played a prominent role in this process. They continued to expand their outreach in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine while enjoying political backing at the highest level. As of December 2024, their membership counted tens of thousands among young people and children in the temporarily occupied parts of the territories of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions as well as in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and in the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine. Their influence is expected to increase in the light of several recent changes to the legal and strategic framework on youth policy prioritising and resourcing patriotic education of youth. Continued involvement of Ukrainian children in such programmes and initiatives heavily exposed them to war propaganda and compelled them to swear allegiance to the occupying power, both of which are prohibited by international law. It also led to violation of their human rights while also violating education-related rights.

⁴³ Around 1 600 000 children in total currently live in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

⁴⁴ International Court of Justice, Application of The International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Ukraine v. Russian Federation), 31 January 2024.

⁴⁵ Almenda: “The Russian Federation’s Policy on the Eradication of Children’s Identity in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine: 2024 Overview”, 24 March 2025.

⁴⁶ Examples include the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

61. The Russian Federation “Strategy of State Cultural Policy until 2030”, alongside the Russian President’s decree on “The Fundamentals of the State Cultural Policy”, approved in September and December 2024 epitomised the systemic character of assimilation. One of the goals of the strategy is the “integration of the Donetsk People’s Republic, Luhansk People’s Republic, the Zaporizhzhia region, and the Kherson region into the Russian cultural and humanitarian space”. Both documents set out specific objectives of increasing the number of children participating in military education activities.

62. Ukrainian authorities undertook efforts to ensure access of schoolchildren in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation to the Ukrainian education system through targeted online programmes which seek also to ensure links with their Ukrainian teachers in the Ukrainian government-controlled territory. Legal procedures have also been envisaged and are pending approval to allow for recognition of outcomes of learning obtained in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine with a view to facilitating enrolment in the Ukrainian institutions. Although a number of children continued to use the availability of Ukrainian online education, parents and children reportedly faced pressure by the Russian occupying authorities including threats of family separation. Further impediments were linked to the obstruction/ban of access to Ukrainian websites. In this situation some families were forced to relocate to Ukrainian government-controlled territory.

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

63. The temporary occupation by the Russian Federation has significantly interfered with the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion. The Secretariat came across numerous reports attesting to acts of violence, including torture, arbitrary detentions, destruction and closure of places of worship and religious schools affecting the clergy and the faithful in/from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.⁴⁷

64. Re-registration imposed on religious communities appears to have profoundly affected the religious landscape in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. As of March 2025, the vast majority of registered entities belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church after the latter’s unilateral takeover of all the eparchies of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.⁴⁸ A small number of Protestant communities were also reportedly able to re-register but with a more limited presence. Other Christian denominations which in principle could not register, notably the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics and Baptist churches, were impeded from freely exercising their rights.⁴⁹ The numbers of religious communities have consequently been on a constant decline throughout the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine compared to the pre-aggression period, while both clergy and active members have reportedly been targets of pressure, harassment and stigmatisation.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 67 members of clergy have lost their lives as a result of the Russian aggression.

⁴⁸ Over 1200 parishes and 23 monasteries.

⁴⁹ The situation of some religious organisations also varies across the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. For example, the Greek Catholic Church was reportedly able to re-register in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea under a different name but is under a ban by the local occupation administration in the temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation part of the Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine.

⁵⁰ For instance, according to the information provided by the Ukrainian authorities, 2 220 religious organisations were registered in the Crimean Peninsula as of 2014, prior to the occupation. By March 2025, this number had decreased to 912.

65. In particular, non-Russian orthodox religious communities have been virtually uprooted in the Crimean Peninsula after a decade-long unrelenting repression, significantly affecting the Ukrainian community as a whole. As noted in previous reports, of the 49 religious communities affiliated with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) before 2014, only seven were known to remain active in early 2022. As far as the OCU is concerned, following the departure of the last OCU priest from the Cathedral of the Equal-to-Apostles Saints Prince Volodymyr and Princess Olha in Simferopol, and the nationalisation of the latter by the occupying authorities, the Crimean Eparchy of the OCU is now considered to have effectively ceased to exist. In July 2024, the OCU's last remaining church in Yevpatoria was demolished. Church buildings of other Christian confessions were also reportedly seized on alleged grounds of illegal property.

66. On 28 June 2024, two Greek Catholic priests previously arrested on extremism charges were released as part of an exchange. One of them was allegedly subjected to torture and ill-treatment during his detention in the temporarily occupied city of Donetsk for confessing to crimes he did not commit. UOC priests opposing incorporation of their parishes in the Russian Orthodox Church or criticising Russia's war of aggression were replaced, arbitrarily detained or convicted. Russian occupation administration prevented the faithful from freely practising their right to freedom of religion. In one case, in August 2024, a woman teacher from Melitopol was handed down a suspended sentence for discrediting the Russian army, after she was detained during a Protestant gathering where she allegedly prayed for Ukraine. Believers of non-registered denominations were also prohibited from gathering in "non-designated" places, threatened with fines and in some cases were subject to searches, interrogations, scrutiny of their phones and social media by Russian security services.

67. Jehovah's Witnesses remained subject to a blanket ban applicable in line with the Russian law throughout the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The occupying authorities repeatedly searched homes, confiscated personal belongings, interrogated and criminally prosecuted followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses. More than 30 Jehovah's Witnesses in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea have already been prosecuted for their faith, including several in new cases reported during the period under review. For example, following searches in the homes of followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Kerch, on 7 August 2024, a 63-year-old woman was detained and her case sent to trial.

68. Russian occupying authorities in the Crimean Peninsula systematically used anti-extremism and anti-terrorist legislation to prosecute and imprison Crimean Tatars and other Muslims perceived as dissenters. On 5 February 2025, five individuals were arrested during a series of raids in private homes of Crimean Tatars in Dzhankoi and other locations allegedly for their affiliation with *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* (banned as terrorist in the Russian Federation). On 21 October 2024, the Russian-appointed so-called "Supreme Court of Crimea" ordered the liquidation of the Alushta Muslim community allegedly for violating the anti-extremist legislation. Other reported incidents included the closure of three Islamic schools in the temporarily occupied City of Simferopol, two in July 2024 and one in January 2025. The Russian occupying authorities claimed that the first two were linked to the allegedly pro-Ukraine Taurida Muftiate and that searches of their premises had led to the identification of extremist literature.⁵¹ Crimean Tatar inmates in Russian prisons complained of being punished with placement in solitary confinement for religious practices such as morning prayers or not being allowed to observe fasts.

⁵¹ The "Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims - Taurida Muftiate" is a Muslim organisation which re-registered under the Russian law. It is however not subordinated to the "Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol" (SAMCS).

V. CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Freedom of expression

69. Russian occupying authorities extensively employed the legislation outlawing “public actions aimed at discrediting Russian Armed Forces”⁵² to suppress dissent, criticism of the war and the expression of pro-Ukrainian sentiment thereby undermining freedom of expression. According to the Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea/Office of the Crimea Platform, 1,279 administrative offences were recorded in the Crimean Peninsula as of March 2025 in a marked year-to-year increase. Repeated offences led to criminal charges with four such cases reported since the legislation was introduced in 2022.

70. OHCHR reported that “residents of the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol were convicted for sharing in social media Ukrainian songs, for calling the Russian offensive against Ukraine a war, for posting pictures containing Ukrainian national symbols or colours, for example, a picture of sweets in blue and yellow”.⁵³ Legal analysis of the court decisions carried out by certain NGOs met has found that cases were adjudicated in a simplified way and lacked reasoning leading to any expression of pro-Ukrainian sentiment to be almost automatically considered as discreditation of the Russian army.⁵⁴ Practically no acquittals have been reported. Prosecutors also reportedly combined the offence with anti-extremism provisions leading to harsher punishment for defendants. On 11 February 2025, the ECtHR found a violation of freedom of expression in a case which included among other applicants two individuals from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea prosecuted for “discrediting the Russian army” due to their anti-war views.⁵⁵

71. The cumulative effect of these laws has effectively muzzled free speech in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. In addition, escalating threats against journalists’ life and safety⁵⁶ contributed to increasing self-censorship. According to the Council of Europe’s Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists, 28 journalists and other media actors were detained by the Russian forces on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine as of February 2025. Among them are journalists who were subjected to arbitrary detention including enforced disappearance, torture and imprisonment on unsubstantiated charges. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, one died in Russian custody. A majority of them are Crimean Tatar “citizen journalists” – a group that has been repeatedly intimidated.

⁵² Article 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code.

⁵³ OHCHR op. cit.

⁵⁴ See Crimean Process, Нуль справ зі складом правопорушення — висновки дослідження про суди за «дискредитацію російської армії», last accessed on 15 May 2025.

⁵⁵ Novaya Gazeta and Others v. Russia (applications nos. 11884/22 and 161 others).

⁵⁶ According to the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), a Ukrainian media watchdog since 24 February 2022, at the time of the report’s writing a total of 107 Ukrainian media workers have lost their lives including 12 killed while performing their duties.

72. On 6 May 2024, a woman Crimean Tatar citizen journalist who covered politically motivated trials was visited twice in the span of several days by two counter-terrorism officials who aimed at interrogating her. She refused but was made to sign a document acknowledging that she had violated “mass protests” rules which could be used as an aggravating circumstance in potential proceedings. She has previously been fined several times. In another case, the editor of the Crimean Tatar newspaper “Qirim” was fined three consecutive times during last year – in December 2024 he was found guilty on administrative charges of misusing information from open sources in connection with a publication about a Soviet dissident.

73. Overall, according to the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), a Ukrainian media watchdog, 117 media outlets are considered to have closed down for reasons related to the temporary occupation since the start of Russia’s full-scale military invasion.

74. The Russian occupying authorities severely restricted access to the Ukrainian information and media space while stepping up measures to diffuse Russian content. They blocked Ukrainian websites and social networks, illegally appropriated Ukrainian frequencies and repurposed transmitters to broadcast Russian television and radio stations and granted access to Russian satellite broadcasting while disrupting Ukrainian satellite broadcast signals. Ukrainian authorities also raised concerns about the destruction of Ukrainian broadcasting and transmitting equipment in areas adjacent to the frontline as a consequence of Russian shelling.

Freedom of assembly and freedom of association

75. All the findings of the previous reports of the Secretary General about freedom of peaceful assembly remain pertinent. Under the martial law in force in the temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation parts of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine, organisation of public assemblies remained prohibited. The blanket ban continued to apply in the temporarily occupied Crimean Peninsula where rallies remained subject to authorisation. Ahead of the 80th anniversary of the Soviet-era deportation of the Crimean Tatar people, on 18 May 2024, Russian occupying authorities reportedly issued warnings to Crimean Tatar local lawyers and activists which contained threats of administrative and criminal sanctions in case of the violation of public assemblies’ rules.⁵⁷

76. The increasingly harsh foreign influence and anti-extremism legislation continued to have a chilling effect including on humanitarian actors. Contracting local partners in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine was not considered safe for international and foreign humanitarian organisations. International humanitarian activities in territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation have been minimal and remain extremely restricted.

⁵⁷ «Крымская солидарность, Сотрудник уголовного розыска пытался опросить правозащитницу Лутфие Зудиеву по поручению Центра «Э», 6 May 2024.

Freedom of movement

77. IHRL guarantees everyone the right to freedom of movement within the borders of the state where they are located, and the right to leave and enter their own country which includes freedom to choose one's residence. Restrictions placed on the exercise of these rights must be in accordance with law, and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the maintenance of *ordre public*, for the prevention of crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.⁵⁸ In addition, collective expulsions are expressly prohibited.⁵⁹

78. As previously reported, the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has led to significant internal and external displacement and population relocations, including forcible transfers which may constitute war crimes. Such movements especially during the initial stages of invasion have resulted in demographic changes in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, the extent and impact of which remains to be determined.

79. In this context, the number of Ukrainians from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine travelling to the Ukrainian government-controlled territory is reported to be steadily decreasing owing to long, complicated and potentially unsafe travel. In the absence of direct crossings, travel to the Ukrainian government-controlled territory represented a long multi-leg route through the Russian Federation and Belarus. It involved passing screening procedures known as "filtration" in checkpoints between the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and Russia, including interrogations by the federal security service aimed at revealing pro-Ukraine views or links to the Ukrainian Armed Forces posing safety risks for those wishing to cross. To be able to leave the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine but also to enter Belarus, Russian documents were required. Ukrainian nationals could cross from Belarus to Ukraine through the Domanove crossing point (Volyn region). The delegation was informed that a total of 501 people including 66 children had crossed into Ukraine in January – February 2025 using this route. Lack of future prospects and insecurity in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, access to medical care, pensions and education in Ukraine were cited as main reasons for relocation.

⁵⁸ See Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 to the Convention.

⁵⁹ See Article 3 of Protocol No. 4 to the Convention.

80. Russian authorities continued to restrict entry to the Russian Federation to Ukrainian citizens, thus impeding them from returning to their places of residence in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and reuniting with their families. Currently, Ukrainian nationals travelling by air transport are allowed to enter the Russian Federation only via the Sheremetyevo International Airport, in Moscow, while the Ludonka crossing point, in the Pskov region serves as the only point of entry for those using land transport. According to public statements of the Russian border authorities, as of April 2025, over 135 000 Ukrainian citizens arrived in the Sheremetyevo airport from 16 October 2023.⁶⁰ Approximately 30 000 were refused entry although the pushback rate is believed to be closer to 50%. Alleged “links with foreign intelligence” and public activities entailing “discreditation of Russian leadership and armed forces” revealed during “filtration” served as motives for such decisions.⁶¹ Rejections usually led to the issuance of an entry ban. In one case reported to the delegation, a family was split as the Russian authorities refused entry to one of the spouses but also prevented the other from crossing back.

VI OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Forcibly transferred and unlawfully deported children

81. Forcible transfers and unlawful deportations constitute violations of several provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in addition to violations of obligations incumbent on an occupying power regarding the protection of children. From the standpoint of the European Convention on Human Rights, the separation of children from their parents may give rise to violations of the right to private and family life (Article 8).

82. As previously reported, cases of movements of Ukrainian children by the Russian forces in the context of the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine have been assessed to have occurred in violation of international humanitarian law, qualifying as unlawful transfers or deportations, which constitute a war crime.⁶² The investigation launched by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in connection with the alleged war crime of transfer of children of Ukraine by the Russian Federation remains ongoing.⁶³ On 14 April 2025, the European Court of Human Rights communicated to the Russian Government a case concerning ten Ukrainian minors who were in childcare in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014 when Russia asserted jurisdiction over the Crimean Peninsula. Russian nationality was allegedly imposed on them, they were put up for adoption and may indeed have been adopted. There has been no information about their whereabouts since 2014 despite the Ukrainian authorities’ repeated requests.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ The date when Russian government regulation № 2723-p regarding the entry of Ukrainian nationals to the Russian Federation entered into force.

⁶¹ Interview of the official representative of FSB border guard service in the Sheremetyevo Airport to the Russian public broadcaster, available online, accessed on 29 April 2024.

⁶² See for example, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/55/66.

⁶³ Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, Press release, 17 March 2023.

⁶⁴ See press release ECHR 094(2025) of 14.04.2025 regarding Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union on behalf of ten Ukrainian children v Russia (application no 6719/23).

83. According to official sources of Ukraine, 19 546 reports of unlawful deportations or forcible transfers of children have been recorded, however, the exact scale has remained difficult to verify.⁶⁵ Many have allegedly been put through adoption procedures across different regions of the Russian Federation and been exposed to assimilation and indoctrination, in contradiction of both IHL and the best interests of the child. Children who later returned to Ukraine recounted having experienced different forms of harassment, including by their Russian peers.⁶⁶ The most affected groups appeared to be orphans and children deprived of parental care, those assigned legal guardianship, those whose parents' fate remains unknown, children with disabilities, and those transferred for medical treatment.

84. At the time of the Secretariat's delegation visit, 1 269 children had been returned to Ukraine, including with the support of the international community, third countries, civil society organisations and volunteers (e.g. the valuable role of *Bring Kids Back UA*). This included children who were known to be deported or forcibly displaced but also those in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine believed to be at such risk. Ukrainian authorities contended that the risk was particularly high for children of current and former military personnel, journalists, activists and local government leaders, children in large families and of parents who received threats of being separated from their children for refusing to obtain Russian passports or enrol them in Russian education facilities. In the same vein they also expressed strong concerns about the large-scale transfers of children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to summer camps in the Russian Federation which continued during the period under review. In some cases, however, individual returns were not reported to the authorities. By the end of 2024, the Ministry of Justice took over the "Register of information on children deported or forcibly displaced due to the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine" with the aim of improving the data collection process in coordination also with international actors.

85. At the same time, the tracing and return process has reportedly been slow and complex. Russian authorities persistently refused to disclose information about the whereabouts, fate and well-being of all the forcibly transferred or deported Ukrainian children while international organisations have been denied access to monitor and assess the situation. Imposition of Russian documents, which as a rule entailed name adaptations, complicated identification efforts, potentially also rendering the return procedures more difficult. Parents who sought to bring their children home undertook intensive and costly efforts and reportedly faced human rights abuses at the hands of Russian forces.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/>, last consulted on 7 May 2025.

⁶⁶ OHCHR, The impact of the armed conflict and occupation on children's rights in Ukraine, 24 February 2022-31 December 2024, p. 14.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

86. The challenges faced by children returning from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or from the Russian Federation has highlighted the importance of their reintegration in a trauma-informed manner. To this end, on 14 May 2024, the government adopted a decree outlining a special procedure. A special Child Rights Protection Center has been set up under the auspices of the ombudsman's office and is tasked with interviewing, carrying out needs assessments and providing emergency assistance. The Ministry of Social Affairs is also mandated with monitoring child reintegration. In meetings with the delegation, the Ministry's representatives reaffirmed that support for family-based options remained a priority of the government in the framework of the Better Care reform. Special focus is given to children with disabilities, who are in need of rehabilitation or inclusive education. Actions have been undertaken to further develop social services including through the monitoring of children by social workers, making available psycho-social and medical support as well as to facilitate reintegration back into the education system.

87. The plight of Ukrainian children forcibly transferred within the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia or unlawfully deported to the Russian Federation and Belarus continued to elicit widespread international attention including in the Council of Europe context. As a signal of his unwavering commitment to the plight of the children of Ukraine and overall support to Ukraine, on 5 February 2025, the Secretary General appointed Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir (former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland) as his Special Envoy on the situation of children of Ukraine. Following her first fact-finding mission to Ukraine in March 2025, the Special Envoy has identified trauma-informed support to children of Ukraine, including for children having returned following unlawful deportation, as one of her top priorities.⁶⁸

Military conscription

88. During the reporting period Russia continued to conscript Ukrainian men from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine into its military forces. Around 8 000 thousand persons were expected to be conscripted during the spring conscription campaign from 1 April to 15 July 2025. Concerns were voiced that despite the fact that conscripts cannot participate in military activities, they were persuaded to sign military service contracts and could thus participate in the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. In addition to the violation of Russia's occupying power's obligations, imposing conscription also violated the right to freedom of movement and consequently access to employment and education.

89. Criminal sanctions continue to be imposed against those who refuse to comply. In the Crimean Peninsula, the number of evasion-related cases continued to rise with 583 cases reported, 274 of which after the start of the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. While most of the cases seem to result in fines, the law also envisages imprisonment for up to two years.

⁶⁸ The Special Envoy will raise awareness of the challenges faced by the children of Ukraine and of the Council of Europe's standards and initiatives to support them, foster international co-operation and ensure internal co-ordination. She will report to the Secretary General and provide regular information to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the activities in support of children of Ukraine. Other initiatives comprise the Consultation Group on Children of Ukraine and the Parliamentary Network on the Situation of Children of Ukraine under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Right to property

90. Numerous reports pointed at a sharp increase in the cases of unlawful expropriation of property in the temporarily occupied parts of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, which belonged to individuals who fled the armed hostilities or left to avoid conscription. Following the identification of such property, the Russian occupation administration could petition courts to “officially” proclaim the property as “abandoned”. The owner was subsequently given 30 days to present a property title, while in practice such registration was open only to holders of Russian passports. Failure to do so could result in the property’s ownership being transferred to the municipality which could allocate it for the use of socially vulnerable groups or put it up for rent. Law enforcement personnel was prioritised for the latter.

91. Following nationalisation of Ukrainian state property, the expropriation of private owners has been in full swing in the temporarily occupied territory of the Crimean Peninsula also pursuant to the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 20 March 2020.⁶⁹ During the period under review, occupying authorities in Crimea regularly reported on auction sales of nationalised property of Ukrainian citizens deemed as “unfriendly to Russia”. The Ukrainian authorities maintained that, overall, 561 individuals and entities, including citizens of foreign countries, were believed to have been affected by nationalisation of their private property, and thus had their property rights violated. The occupying authorities in Crimea have also reportedly moved to reclaim land plots which under Soviet-era laws were allocated to military organisations but after Ukraine’s independence were given for use to Ukrainian citizens.

Update on accountability

92. Despite the staggering scale and gravity of human rights abuses, cases where Russian authorities sought to hold the perpetrators accountable remain to date isolated and limited only to ordinary Russian servicemen. In November 2024, two Russian soldiers received life sentences for murdering an entire family of nine in the temporarily occupied part of the Donetsk region of Ukraine. Failure to investigate combined with statements of Russian government officials continued to contribute to a permissive environment for impunity. The Russian Federation also failed to co-operate with international bodies established to investigate human rights abuses.

93. Ukraine’s Prosecutor General’s Office (PGO) informed the Secretariat that it has opened investigations into over 157 000 cases of war-related crimes. 153 cases had resulted in convictions, mostly in absentia. In view of the enormous caseload, the investigations’ focus has been on so-called “structural cases” which allegedly involve military leadership and individuals giving the orders for actions resulting in or constituting a war crime. The PGO furthermore emphasised the importance of proceedings in several Council of Europe member states based on universal jurisdiction. The Joint Investigation Team under the auspices of Eurojust continued to coordinate work on investigations at European level.

⁶⁹ The decree classified that almost all the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol of Ukraine was entered into the “border territory of the Russian Federation”, where foreigners are banned from owning land lots.

94. On 21 August 2024, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine voted to ratify the Rome Statute. Ukraine's membership in the International Criminal Court became effective on 1 January 2025. While the ratification was welcomed as a positive step for delivering justice to the victims of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, calls were voiced for addressing limitations voted on as part of the ratification law under the Article 124 of the Statute. At national level, further work has been underway to align national criminal procedure legislation with international standards, notably regarding trials *in absentia*.

95. In 2024 around 2 900 new indictments for alleged collaboration with the Russian occupying authorities were sent to court and 841 guilty verdicts were issued.⁷⁰ OHCHR however reported that the number of convicted individuals was on a downward trend in 2024, as compared to previous years.⁷¹ Concerns however persisted due to a number of cases where individuals were criminally prosecuted for work which they were compelled to do by the Russian occupying authorities. Despite calls to bring more clarity in the legal framework, changes have remained pending. As regards implementation, during the delegation's visit, the authorities argued that that legal safeguards such as the primacy of international law or criminal code provisions that would purportedly exclude collaboration under duress did exist. To this effect, an inter-agency working group had been established and specific guidelines were developed by the PGO.

96. During the period under review, the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine ("Register of Damage for Ukraine") continued to receive and record claims for compensation for the damage, loss, and injury inflicted by the war of aggression. In parallel, new claims categories were launched.⁷² To date, over 27 000 claims have been received and more than 5 000 recorded. The treaty negotiations on establishing a Claims Commission for Ukraine are ongoing and are at the advanced stage.

97. On 19-21 March 2025, in Strasbourg, after more than two years and 14 in person meetings, the Core Group for the Establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine finalised the technical work on the draft documents necessary for the establishment of the Special Tribunal within the framework of the Council of Europe. At their meeting on 9 May in Lviv, Ukraine, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the states participating in the work of the Core Group gave a political support to the process of establishment of the Special Tribunal. At the 134th Session of the Committee of Ministers (Luxembourg, 13-14 May 2025), the Ukrainian authorities invited the Secretary General by a letter to start the process for the establishment of the Special Tribunal. Following the adoption by vote of the subsequent decisions by the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and the President of Ukraine signed an agreement on the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, including its Statute, on 25 June 2025, in Strasbourg.

⁷⁰ Article 111 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.

⁷¹ See OHCHR op. cit.

⁷² The following categories for claims are open: involuntary internal displacement; death of an immediate family member; missing immediate family member; serious personal injury; sexual violence; torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; deprivation of liberty; forced labour or service; damage or destruction of residential and non-residential immovable property.