

## Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

|                                    |                                                     |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Bilagsnr.:                         | 550                                                 |
| Land:                              | Ukraine                                             |
| Kilde:                             | Amnesty International                               |
| Titel:                             | The State of the World's Human Rights; Ukraine 2024 |
| Udgivet:                           | 29. april 2025                                      |
| Optaget på<br>baggrundsmaterialet: | 21. juli 2025                                       |



Document #2124763

Amnesty International (Author)

## The State of the World's Human Rights; Ukraine 2024

Civilian casualties, including children and older people, increased, as Russian forces used indiscriminate weapons, damaged critical civilian infrastructure and appeared to deliberately target civilians. Executions, torture and other ill-treatment of civilian detainees and prisoners of war took place in the Russian-occupied territories, where the repression of non-Russian identities continued. Under martial law, the Ukrainian authorities restricted the rights to freedom of expression and religion. Prosecutions continued against conscientious objectors to compulsory military service. Ukraine's progress on gender-based violence and LGBTI people's rights remained limited.

### Background

Russia continued its war of aggression against Ukraine, despite sustaining considerable losses, and made territorial gains, notably in February occupying the town of Avdiivka which had been a Ukrainian stronghold since 2014. Russian advances in the Kharkiv region were largely contained by Ukrainian forces. In August, Ukraine launched a surprise offensive into Russia's Kursk region, occupying several hundred square kilometres of territory. To address manpower shortages, in April Ukraine passed legislation lowering the mobilization age from 27 to 25.

Foreign military and financial aid to Ukraine continued, with concerns over its future sustainability, particularly after Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election. Ukraine's economy managed to grow throughout 2024, though severely damaged by labour shortages as well as recurrent, countrywide electricity blackouts caused by Russia's deliberate targeting of energy infrastructure.

In April, Ukraine notified the Council of Europe that it was reducing the scope of its derogations to fewer articles of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and dropping the derogations related to forced or

compulsory labour, freedom of thought, conscience or religion, right to an effective remedy and prohibition of discrimination.

## Violations of international humanitarian law

### Unlawful attacks

Civilian casualties were higher than in 2023, and often occurred far from the active front line, as Russia continued to target population centres with missiles and drones. These attacks included one against Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in the capital, Kyiv, which was severely damaged after being struck with a cruise missile on 8 July – an apparent war crime.<sup>1</sup> Children from all over Ukraine were undergoing medical procedures, such as chemotherapy and reconstructive surgery, at the time. Two people were killed and over 100 wounded, including children. Like numerous other attacks over 2024, the strike on Okhmatdyt was part of a wider coordinated Russian attack; at least 43 civilians in the cities of Kyiv, Dnipro and Kryvyi Rih were killed on the same day.

Russia continued its systematic attacks against energy infrastructure. According to the International Energy Association, 70% of Ukraine's thermal energy generation capacity had been either destroyed or occupied as of May. The shortfall in electricity generation resulted in regular rolling blackouts, particularly in the hot summer months and in winter as the cumulative damage was the greatest and demand peaked.

### Prisoners of war

Increasing evidence came to light of summary executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war by Russian forces. Numerous videos purporting to show such incidents circulated on social media, and the Ukrainian General Prosecutor's Office claimed that at least 147 Ukrainian prisoners had been executed since 2022, almost 90% (127) of them in 2024. While Russia typically ignored or rejected these reports, two significant political figures in Russia called for the execution of prisoners of war. In July, Deputy Chair of the Security Council Dmitri Medvedev called for "total executions" on his Telegram channel. In October, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov publicly claimed that he had given an order not to take Ukrainian soldiers alive. Three days later, however, he stated on Telegram that he had revoked this order.

Hundreds of Ukrainian prisoners of war were tried in Russia and in areas of Ukraine it occupied, often merely for participating in hostilities. The lack of due process in such trials also amounted to a war crime.

## Right to truth, justice and reparation

On 21 August the Ukrainian parliament voted to ratify the Rome Statute of the ICC but with a declaration under Article 124 that, for a period of seven

years, Ukraine would “not accept the jurisdiction” of the ICC with respect to war crimes “when, likely, the crime was committed by its citizens.” This created an ambiguity that could impede effective ICC investigations into crimes under international law committed in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

The ICC issued further arrest warrants for three high-ranking Russian military commanders and the then-minister of defence Sergei Shoigu. All four individuals stood accused of war crimes committed in Ukraine. These included directing attacks against the civilian population and causing excessive incidental harm to civilians or damage to civilian objects, as well as the crime against humanity of inhumane acts.

## Older people's rights

Older people continued to be disproportionately affected by Russia's aggression. According to HelpAge International, older people and people with disabilities comprised between 20% and 50% of those living within 25km of the active front lines. This group, who were often unable to reach physically inaccessible shelters during air raid alerts due to disabilities, remained among the most at risk.

Older people, 80% of whom lived below the real poverty line due to extremely low pensions, also remained largely unable to access housing when displaced by the conflict. They were overrepresented in shelters for displaced persons because they lacked the income to find rental or other housing. These shelters were not physically accessible to older people with disabilities, which resulted in the placement of thousands of older people with disabilities in care institutions since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In September, a Russian bomb struck a nursing home in Sumy, killing one person and injuring at least 12 others in facilities protected under international humanitarian law.

## Freedom of expression

In April, Ukraine reduced the scope of its derogations from the ECHR but maintained that regarding Article 10, concerning the right to freedom of expression. A number of leading media organizations complained of pressure from Ukrainian authorities. In January, bihus.info journalists reported that they were under surveillance, including having their phones tapped. An investigation into these allegations was opened by the Security Service of Ukraine despite its members being suspected of the practice. Due to concerns over a conflict of interest, the State Bureau of Investigation took over the investigation; this was ongoing at year's end. In October the editorial board of leading newspaper Ukrainska Pravda alleged that the Office of the President was, among other things, pressuring businesses not to advertise with the newspaper in an attempt to force a change in its editorial policy. Authorities denied the allegations,

and President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that pressure on journalists was “unacceptable”.

Prosecution of individuals under Article 436-2 of the criminal code – “justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine” – continued. However, as of November, the number of criminal cases referred to court under this article fell by 29% compared to 2023.

## Freedom of religion and belief

In August, a law came into force banning “religious organizations affiliated with centres of influence” when their headquarters were based “in a country that commits armed aggression against Ukraine.”

The law referred to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which remained in disputed ecclesiastical subordination to the Russian Orthodox Church. The law required the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to break off that affiliation within nine months. Ukrainian authorities accused the church of working closely with Russian intelligence, and brought charges of justifying Russian aggression against its priests and parishioners.

## Discrimination

As the authorities stepped up conscription efforts, some methods caused a public backlash for appearing to be disproportionate, arbitrary or discriminatory. For example, to address the high number of conscription deferrals for male doctorate students, education authorities discontinued applications for self-funded full-time postgraduate studies for both men and women, even though women were not subject to compulsory conscription.

## Conscientious objectors' rights

Religious freedom watchdog Forum18 reported a surge of new criminal cases opened against conscientious objectors since the middle of the year, bringing the total number to around 300, in addition to over 80 cases that had already reached trial. The case of one conscientious objector, Dmytro Zelinsky, reached the Constitutional Court in October after the Supreme Court rejected his final appeal. The Constitutional Court was still deliberating in December whether denying the constitutional right to conscientious objection was permitted under martial law. No grants of alternative civilian service had been made since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022.

## Gender-based violence

The Prosecutor General's Office reported an 80% increase in registered cases of domestic violence compared to 2023, with the number of survivors from these cases exceeding 5,000, most of them women and children. A policy brief published by the Global Public Policy Institute named sexual crimes by members of the Russian forces, the precarious living conditions of internally displaced people, economic instability, rigid gender roles and war-related stress and trauma among the main causes of gender-based violence.

Parliament adopted a new law in May aimed at harmonizing Ukraine's criminal code with the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), following its ratification in 2022. Among other things, the law introduced criminal offences for a range of gender-based violence acts including intimidation and sexual harassment both offline and online.

## LGBTI people's rights

In June the first Pride Equality March since 2021 took place in Kyiv. However, no substantial progress was made toward legal recognition and protection of same-sex couples' rights. The relevant draft law, first registered in March 2023, had yet to be considered by parliament. A draft law from 2021, which proposed including sexual orientation and gender identity as aggravating circumstances of hate crimes in the criminal code, was not considered.

## Right to a healthy environment

Local NGOs reported extensive and long-lasting environmental damage caused by the ongoing Russian war of aggression, including soil, water and air pollution in mainland Ukraine and the Black Sea. Authorities and environmentalists reported pollution of the rivers Seim and Desna in August and September, originating upstream in Russia; this caused mass death of fish.

In June, the government adopted a National Energy and Climate Plan that aimed to harmonize Ukraine's energy and climate policies with those of the EU, including through phasing out coal-based electricity generation by 2035.

## Russian-occupied territories (government of Russia)

### Right to education

Violation of the right to education continued across the occupied territories, with children subjected to indoctrination, and the occupation

authorities reliant on coercion of teachers that in some cases amounted to forced labour.<sup>3</sup>

## Suppression of non-Russian identities

Russia continued its policy of “Russification” of the occupied territories, including Crimea.<sup>4</sup> In January, the International Court of Justice ruled that the restrictions on delivery of education in the Ukrainian language amounted to a violation of the CERD.

Religious minorities and non-Russian media and culture remained under attack. De facto authorities in the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions informed their residents that the “passports” they had begun issuing in 2016 would become invalid from 1 December 2024 and had to be exchanged for full Russian passports. Residents without Russian passports would be considered “foreign citizens”, denied access to some essential services and be at risk of deportation.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in June that Russia’s administration of Crimea violated numerous human rights, by imposing Russian citizenship on Crimean residents, transferring detainees to Russia, forcibly disappearing residents, and repressing religious and media freedoms. The ECtHR held that the treatment of the Crimean Tatar people – including the forced closure of political and cultural institutions, persecution of community leaders and attacks against private property – was discriminatory. Crackdowns against minority groups in Crimea continued, including against Crimean Tatars suspected of belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir, as well as Jehovah’s Witnesses, two of whom were jailed in October.

## Torture and other ill-treatment

Credible reports of torture and other ill-treatment, as well as enforced disappearances of Ukrainian civilians and military personnel, continued. Some 97% of former Ukrainian prisoners of war interviewed by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine reported being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in Russian captivity, including severe beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence, sleep deprivation and mock executions. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine reported in October that the Russian authorities had pursued “a coordinated state policy of torturing Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war”; it found that this amounted to crimes against humanity.

Maksym Butkevych, a human rights defender and prisoner of war since June 2022, was released in a prisoner swap in October. He had been convicted of a purported war crime by a de facto court in the occupied city of Luhansk, on the basis of a forced videotaped “confession”.<sup>5</sup>

Journalist Victoria Roshchyna, forcibly disappeared from occupied Melitopol in August 2023, was confirmed to be in Russian custody in April

and died in Russia's Taganrog pretrial detention centre, infamous for the alleged torture of inmates.

## Denial of access

Russia did not grant UN monitors access to places of detention where Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war were held. Other international organizations, including humanitarian ones, had limited or no access to places of detention under Russian control, or to the occupied territories generally. This, together with restrictions on the movement of civilians in these territories, prevented residents from accessing essential services.

Russia's allegations of violations of international law by Ukrainian forces, such as their alleged deadly attack against a market in Donetsk in January, could not be impartially documented, due to a lack of access for independent media and human rights organizations.

## Internally displaced people's rights

In March, the de facto authorities in the occupied Donetsk region adopted a measure allowing for the expropriation of property left behind by displaced persons. They listed "ownerless" properties online and gave the owners 30 days to appear in person and present a Russian or locally issued "passport" to regain ownership. This measure amounted to expropriation of property targeting displaced persons.

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1. ["Ukraine: Russian strikes exact increasingly heavy toll on Ukraine's children", 18 November ↩](#)
  2. ["Ukraine: Ratifying the Rome Statute a welcome step, but limitations must be addressed", 22 August ↩](#)
  3. ["Ukraine/Russia: Teachers in Russian-occupied territories coerced to teach Russian curriculum through threats and violence", 4 October ↩](#)
  4. [Ukraine/Russia: Ten Years of Occupation of Crimea: Russia Is Seeking to Effect Demographic Change while Suppressing Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar Identities, 18 March ↩](#)
  5. ["Ukraine: Russia's reprisals against prominent Ukrainian human rights defender who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine", 17 August ↩](#)

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## Associated documents

Document ID 2124763 Translation / language version

29 April 2025 | [Amnesty International](#) (Author)

Ukraine

## Report on the human rights situation (covering 2024)

[Amnesty Report 2024/25: Zur Lage der Menschenrechte weltweit; Ukraine 2024](#) (Periodical Report, German)

de

ID 2124771

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### ecoi.net description:

Report on the human rights situation (covering 2024)

### Country:

Ukraine

### Source:

[Amnesty International](#) (Author)

### Published:

29 April 2025

### Original link:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/ukraine/report-ukraine/>

### Document type:

Periodical Report

### Language:

English

### Available on ecoi.net since:

29 April 2025

### Document ID:

2124763

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Austrian Red Cross  
Austrian Centre for  
Country of Origin and  
Asylum Research and  
Documentation  
(ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße  
32, 1041 Wien  
T +43 1 589 00 583  
F +43 1 589 00 589  
info@ecoi.net

Contact  
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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

