

# Ukraine 2023 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

Note: The human rights situation in territories occupied by Russia at the time of writing, including Crimea and parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, are covered in a separate subreport. The main body of this report covers the human rights situation in Ukrainian government-controlled territory as of the end of 2023; thus, abuses committed by Russia's forces on territory liberated from Russian control during the reporting period are included in the main body of this report.

In February 2022, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, launched an unlawful and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which was marked by pervasive war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other atrocities committed by members of Russia's forces. Throughout 2023, Russia's forces launched constant attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Russia's forces continued to conduct hostilities, including launching missile and drone strikes throughout Ukraine, hitting multifamily residences and critical infrastructure, including power, water, and heating facilities. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that widespread attacks by Russia's forces against critical infrastructure during the coldest months of the year caused the humanitarian situation to further deteriorate, leading to mass displacement of civilians.

Significant human rights abuses committed by Russia's forces in areas that were under Russian control involved severe and wide-ranging cases and included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees, particularly during "filtration" operations involving interrogation, torture, forced separation of families, forced transfer, deportation, and wrongful adoption of Ukraine's children to Russian families; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including reportedly widespread civilian deaths, enforced disappearances and abductions, torture, and physical abuses; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and the existence of criminal libel; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive "laws" on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; severe restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement; inability of citizens in Russia-occupied territories to be governed by a government of their choosing via free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious

corruption; serious restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence including rape; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups, or members of Indigenous groups, including Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, intersex, or other sexual minority persons; and the existence of the worst forms of child labor. (See Russia-occupied areas section for abuses committed by Russian military, security, and proxy forces in those territories Russia occupied at year's end.)

There were also significant human rights issues involving Ukrainian government officials, although not comparable to the scope of Russia's abuses, which included credible reports of: enforced disappearance; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; restrictions on freedom of expression, including for members of the media, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association; restrictions on freedom of movement; serious government corruption; extensive gender-based violence; systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and the existence of the worst forms of

child labor. Some of these human rights issues stemmed from martial law, which continued to curtail democratic freedoms, including freedom of movement, freedom of the press, freedom of peaceful assembly, and legal protections.

The government often did not take adequate steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed abuses.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were no reports indicating the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

A State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) investigation continued at year's end into the March 2022 death of Denys Kireyev, a member of a delegation that conducted early negotiations with Russia. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) allegedly killed Kireyev after obtaining a recording of Kireyev allegedly implicating himself in treason. Senior government sources disputed any claims of treason by Kireyev. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the circumstances of Kireyev's death remained unclear.

The investigation of the 2021 death of exiled Belarusian human rights activist Vitaly Shyshou (often reported as Vitaly Shishov) continued at year's end, with no substantial updates. Shyshou disappeared in 2021 after leaving his Kyiv home, and his body was found hanged from a tree the following day. He had been in Kyiv since the fall of 2020 and helped found Belarus House, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that assisted Belarusians fleeing the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Belarus House representatives stated they believed Shyshou's death was an act of transnational repression by the Belarusian State Security Committee in line with the Lukashenka regime's crackdown and repression against civil society activists.

Law enforcement agencies continued to investigate killings and other crimes committed during the Revolution of Dignity protests in Kyiv in 2013-14.

There were extensive civilian casualties in connection with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

## **b. Disappearance**

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 75 cases of arbitrary detention of civilians by law enforcement or armed forces, some of which the report stated amounted to enforced disappearance.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine spurred significant numbers of missing persons

since 2014. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, approximately 26,000 individuals were missing as of October. As of June, law enforcement officials launched more than 3,300 criminal proceedings as well as a national registry on missing persons.

In connection with abuses committed by security officials against protesters during the 2013-14 Revolution of Dignity, 32 persons were notified of suspicion and 30 indictments against 60 persons were sent to the courts during the year.

On April 3, a district Court in Kyiv found Oleksandr Medvid guilty of kidnapping Revolution of Dignity activists Yuriy Verbytskyy and Ihor Lutsenko. The court sentenced him to five years of imprisonment. Medvid was released from punishment due to the expiration of the statute of limitations.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

Although the constitution and law prohibited torture and other cruel and unusual punishment, there were reports law enforcement authorities engaged in such abuse. Under normal circumstances, courts could not legally use confessions and statements made under duress to police by persons in custody as evidence in court proceedings, but the institution of martial law since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion permitted this.

There were reports law enforcement and military officials abused and, at times, tortured persons in custody to obtain confessions, usually related to alleged collaboration with Russia.

In August, the SBI detained two police officers in Cherkasy Oblast who illegally arrested a local resident. The police officers reportedly engaged in cruel and degrading punishment to extract a confession, including beating and firing several shots near the victim. The suspects were charged with exceeding their official authority and faced up to eight years in prison.

On July 28, a city court arrested Serhiy Lutsyuk, the chief military commissar of Rivne Oblast. Together with the head of the district military enlistment office, he allegedly beat another military officer with a bat and forced him to “beg for forgiveness” on his knees. The official was charged with exceeding authority under martial law.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison and detention center conditions remained poor and at times posed a serious threat to the life and health of prisoners. Physical abuse, lack of proper medical care and nutrition, poor sanitation, and lack of adequate light were persistent problems.

Inmates reported authorities and so-called assistants from the inmate population used cruel and degrading treatment, as well as physical and sexual violence.

While officials generally allowed prisoners, except those in disciplinary cells, to receive visitors, prisoner rights groups noted some families had to pay bribes to obtain permission for visits to which they were entitled by law.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** Approximately 11 penal institutions and 3,000 inmates remained in areas of active conflict between Russian and Ukrainian forces. According to the Ministry of Justice, the government evacuated approximately 4,000 inmates to facilities located in the regions away from the war zone. Overcrowding remained a problem in some pretrial detention facilities.

Monitors from the Ombudsperson's Office, the National Preventive Mechanism, and the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHPG) reported poor conditions in the Kharkiv remand prison, the Dykanivska correctional colony, and the Temnivska correctional facility during August visits. The facilities were crowded and lacked adequate lighting, walls were damp and covered with mold, and frayed and exposed electrical wires posed a danger to the life and health of detainees.

Physical abuse by guards was a problem. KHPG monitors received reports from an inmate serving in the Kharkiv Correctional Colony (No. 43) of torture by electric current, mistreatment, and humiliation perpetrated by the prison administration.

In September, inmate Mykyta Mezentsev died in Lukyanivske remand facility

in Kyiv from late-stage cancer, despite numerous appeals for specialized medical treatment for her late-stage cancer and release.

The condition of prison facilities and places of unofficial detention in Russia-occupied areas were harsh and life threatening.

**Administration:** Although prisoners and detainees could file complaints with the Ombudsperson's Office, human rights organizations reported prison officials censored or discouraged complaints and penalized and abused inmates who filed them. Human rights groups reported regulations did not always provide for confidentiality and authorities did not always conduct proper investigations. KHPG monitoring visits revealed that 18 institutions did not have any method for inmates to register complaints.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government generally permitted independent monitoring of prisons and detention centers by international and local human rights groups, including the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the Ombudsperson's Office, and the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU).

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but the government did not always observe these requirements.

## Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law authorized detention for 72 hours before a judge was required to authorize continued detention. In some cases, authorities detained persons for longer than three days without a warrant. A bail system existed. A court could, in lieu of detention, order house arrest, release on personal recognizance, release on the guarantee of a high official, or limit liberty (house arrest, travel ban) pending trial.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** The HRMMU's October update, covering February through July, documented that Ukrainian armed forces and law enforcement bodies committed six cases of arbitrary detention.

In Ukrainian government-controlled territory, the OHCHR continued to receive allegations the Security Service of Ukraine detained and abused individuals in both official and unofficial places of detention to obtain information and pressure suspects to confess or cooperate. The OHCHR reported 65 cases in which Ukrainian security forces allegedly held persons incommunicado in unofficial places of detention for periods lasting from several hours to four and a half months. This practice was reportedly used to coerce detainees to make incriminating statements. Of interviewed detainees, 57 percent described being subjected to torture or ill-treatment by Ukrainian security forces, predominantly in unofficial places of detention and sometimes in pretrial detention facilities. According to the OHCHR June report, a significant number of cases of arbitrary detention amounted to

enforced disappearance. In such cases, law enforcement officers, mainly from the Security Service of Ukraine, detained civilians without court authorization, held them incommunicado for several days, denied them access to counsel, and declined to disclose information to their relatives.

### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

While the constitution provided for an independent judiciary, courts were inefficient and remained highly vulnerable to political pressure and corruption. Confidence in the judiciary remained low, except for the High Anti-Corruption Court.

Despite efforts to reform the judiciary and the Office of the Prosecutor General, systemic corruption among judges and prosecutors persisted. Civil society groups continued to report weak separation of powers between the executive and judicial branches of government.

Some judges and prosecutors reportedly took bribes in exchange for legal determinations. Russia's invasion slowed down judicial proceedings, while other factors, such as lengthy court proceedings, particularly in administrative courts, inadequate funding and staffing, and the inability of courts to enforce rulings impeded fair trial guarantees.

Outcomes of trials sometimes appeared predetermined by government or other interference. Court-monitoring groups criticized procedural violations in investigations and trials, including improper reliance on hearsay evidence

and written witness testimony. Human rights NGOs attributed these alleged violations to possible biases of the judges and political pressure from senior justice and law enforcement officials.

## **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and criminal code provided for the right to a fair and public trial. Human rights groups noted judges and defense lawyers' reliance on ineffective investigations and misuse of trial extensions sometimes caused undue trial delays. The National Bar Association criticized amendments to the criminal code enabled under martial law, claiming the changes compromised the objectivity of investigations and significantly weakened the due-process rights of defendants. The law presumed defendants were innocent, and they could not be legally compelled to testify or confess, although some pointed to high conviction rates as a reason to call into question the legal presumption of innocence.

The criminal code allowed investigations to be conducted in absentia, removing what human rights groups considered a key obstacle to investigating human rights abuses.

Authorities generally failed to effectively investigate and prosecute perpetrators for interfering in investigations and manipulating court proceedings. Court monitoring groups reported judges sometimes admitted hearsay as evidence and allowed witnesses to submit testimony in writing

rather than appear in person, although the criminal code had a provision to admit hearsay if a witness was absent from the country or medically unable to testify.

Trials were open to the public, but some judges prohibited media from observing proceedings. While procedures required trials to start no later than three weeks after charges were filed, prosecutors seldom met this requirement, at least in part due to case backlogs. Human rights groups reported officials occasionally monitored meetings between defense attorneys and their clients.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees in the government-controlled area of Ukraine.

### **f. Transnational Repression**

Not applicable.

### **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

The country endorsed the 2009 Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues but had not passed any laws dealing with the restitution of private or communal property, although the latter was partly resolved through regulations and decrees. Over the last decade, the most successful

cases of restitution took place because of tacit and behind-the-scenes lobbying on behalf of Jewish groups.

For information regarding Holocaust-era property restitution and related issues, please see the Department of State's *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act* report to Congress, released in 2020, at <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

## **h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution prohibited such actions, but there were reports authorities generally did not respect the prohibitions.

By law, the Security Service could not conduct surveillance or searches without a court-issued warrant. The Security Service and law enforcement agencies, however, sometimes conducted searches without a proper warrant, which human rights groups partially attributed to the Security Service's wide mandate to conduct both law enforcement and counterintelligence tasks. In an emergency, authorities could initiate a search without prior court approval, but they had to seek court approval immediately after the investigation began. Many citizens were not aware of their rights or that authorities had violated their privacy.

Law enforcement bodies monitored the internet, at times without

appropriate legal authority, and took significant steps to block access to websites based on “national security concerns.”

## **i. Conflict-related Abuses**

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 significantly raised the level of violence and scope of abuses throughout the country. Russia’s forces and its proxy forces methodically obstructed, harassed, and intimidated international monitors, denying them access to systematically record abuses. International organizations and NGOs, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the OSCE, and the OHCHR, issued periodic reports documenting abuses committed by Russia and Ukraine during the war. (See the Russia-occupied areas section for abuses by Russia and Russia’s proxy forces committed in occupied areas.)

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the Office of the Prosecutor General recorded nearly 100,000 instances of war crimes committed by Russia’s forces. Russia’s full-scale invasion significantly increased the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As of October, there were more than five million IDPs, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and more than six million refugees from Ukraine outside the country, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The HRMMU noted hostilities continued to affect the lives of civilians throughout the country, but particularly those residing in or near the Russia-

occupied areas. Regular exchanges of fire across the line of contact exposed those residents to the constant threat of death or injury, while property and critical infrastructure continued to be destroyed or damaged in the fighting.

On September 4, the United Nation's Independent Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Ukraine concluded Russia's forces committed an array of war crimes and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law based on its investigations of events in Kyiv and Cherkasy Oblast in August.

The COI documented violations that included willful killings, unlawful confinement, torture, rape and other sexual violence, unlawful transfers and deportations of protected persons and children. Many of those violations qualified as war crimes, and the COI report also determined some could amount to crimes against humanity, such as the use of torture and attacks on the civilian infrastructure.

**Killings:** As of September, the OHCHR recorded 27,149 civilian casualties, following Russia's full-scale invasion: 9,614 killed and 17,535 injured. Of those killed, 4,262 were in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (see Russian-Occupied Areas section). The OHCHR estimated the actual figures were considerably higher but continued fighting constrained its documentation efforts. The OHCHR assessed most of these casualties were due to explosive weapons with wide-area effects, including heavy artillery, multiple-launch rocket systems, missiles, and air strikes.

Russia's armed forces routinely bombarded civilian areas, leading to the deaths of hundreds of civilians. For example, some of the heaviest casualties were reported during Russia's battle for Bakhmut. According to the OHCHR, most of the victims were either summarily executed or shot while leaving their homes to gather supplies or seek safety.

On October 5, a missile struck a cafe in the small village of Hroza, Kharkiv Oblast, killing 59 persons attending a funeral reception.

On June 17, volunteers Svitlana Klimenko and Yuriy Holovin were killed in the village of Huryiv Kozachok, Kharkiv Oblast. The Russian military struck their civilian vehicle with an antitank missile system.

**Abductions:** National police registered more than 26,000 missing persons reports (11,000 civilians; 15,000 service members) since Russia launched its full-scale invasion.

**Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture:** There were reports Ukrainian forces and Russia's forces abused civilians and captured fighters, with the vast majority of abuses perpetrated by the Russian side. Observers noted the active hostilities and insecurity in conflict-affected territories compounded the situation and made it difficult to document abuses.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited hundreds of prisoners of war in Russia and in Ukraine, although Russia severely limited observers' access to detention sites, making monitoring and tracking

Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and detained Ukrainian civilians extremely difficult. ICRC, and continued to demand access to all prisoners of war and civilian detainees. As of October 31, the OHCHR documented summary executions and attacks on individual civilians by Russia's armed forces in more than 100 villages and towns of the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy Oblasts, all of which were in locations not linked to active fighting. In a March report, the OHCHR documented the summary executions of 14 Ukrainian POWs shortly after their capture by members of the Russian armed forces or Wagner Group fighters. In July, it also documented executions of 77 civilian detainees by Russia's forces.

Ukrainian authorities continued to exhume mass graves of those killed by Russia's forces in liberated areas. For example, authorities uncovered bodies of additional victims in the Lymanska, Sviatohirska, Donetsk, Bohorodychne, and Lyman communities. Donetsk police recorded 385 exhumed bodies in areas liberated by Ukraine's forces, of which 309 were civilians, as of October.

OHCHR monitors also expressed concern regarding recurring human rights and international humanitarian law violations by Ukrainian authorities in trials involving members of Russia's armed forces and affiliated armed groups. The OHCHR documented 33 cases of unjust detention, disappearance, torture, and mistreatment of defendants and suspects in order to compel them to testify; procedural violations for house searches or

arrests; and lack of access to legal counsel during the initial period of detention and interrogation.

According to the HRMMU, the lack of effective investigation into previously documented cases of torture and other physical abuse by Ukrainian officials against those charged with treason was a concern.

**Other Conflict-related Abuse:** Russia's forces routinely struck critical infrastructure, including energy, schools, hospitals, and residential facilities. During mass attacks on March 22, Russia's drones struck college facilities in Rzhyschiv, Kyiv Oblast, killing nine persons, including students, and injuring seven. Russia's forces struck two apartment buildings in Zaporizhzhia, killing one and injuring 34.

On July 11-31, Russian armed forces launched numerous missiles and loitering munitions attacks targeting the city of Odesa and the surrounding oblast. In addition to killing four civilians and wounding 43, the strikes also damaged grain terminals, warehouses, port infrastructure, industrial equipment, and administrative buildings and caused substantial disruption to global food supply lines. Heavy shelling from Russia's forces damaged the historic center of Odesa, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Strikes by Russia's forces subsequently severely damaged the culturally significant Transfiguration Cathedral.

In one of the largest air attacks since the start of the full-scale invasion, on

December 29, Russia launched 158 combined drones and missiles against Ukraine, including 36 Shahed attack UAVs and 122 missiles of mixed types. Civil-military authorities reported damage to residential buildings, private homes, medical facilities, factories, schools, and other key pieces of infrastructure. The Ministry of Interior separately reported damage to ammunition, tank, and aviation factories.

There were allegations that Russia's forces used Ukrainian civilians as human shields, particularly in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson Oblasts, by stationing military units within civilian residential buildings.

Numerous international organizations, NGOs, and Ukrainian government agencies reported on Russia's systematic forcible transfer and deportation of Ukraine's children. (See Russia-occupied Areas, below, for details.)

The Ministry of Reintegration stated Russia and Russia-led proxy forces refused to return the children to their parents when Ukrainian forces liberated formerly Russia-controlled territories. Russia did not allow sufficient access to international observers or organizations to locate or return children; if children were located, their relatives had to undertake costly and dangerous trips to Russia and endure harassment and interrogation by security forces to retrieve their children. As of December, the Ombudsperson's Office reported only 387 deported children had returned from Russia.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for the press and other media, but authorities did not always respect these rights. President Zelenskyy signed a decree imposing martial law in February 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which permitted further restrictions on the media and media freedoms. For example, the national TV Marathon – a rotating platform of channels that take the government line on war reporting – enabled an unprecedented level of control over primetime television news. Moreover, some media outlets reported being removed from lucrative terrestrial broadcasting contracts and pressure from the Office of the President as early as the spring of 2022.

The government banned, blocked, or sanctioned media outlets and individual journalists deemed a threat to national security or who expressed positions authorities believed undermined the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Some speakers who were critical of the government were also blacklisted from government-directed news programming.

Investigative journalists critical of the government were sometimes targeted by negative social media campaigns, sometimes via government-friendly channels. Other practices continued to affect media freedom, including self-

ensorship.

**Freedom of Expression:** With few exceptions, individuals in areas under Ukrainian government control could generally criticize the government publicly and privately and discuss matters of public interest without fear of official reprisal.

The law criminalized the display of communist and Nazi symbols as well as the manufacture or promotion of the St. George's ribbon, a symbol associated with Russia's forces and Russian irredentism. On May 1, a court in Myrhorod, Poltava Oblast, fined a woman who was selling items with communist symbols. She was found guilty of manufacturing and distributing communist and Nazi symbols and propaganda of communist and national socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes.

The law prohibited statements that threatened the country's territorial integrity, promoted war, instigated racial or religious conflict, or supported Russia's aggression against the country, and the government prosecuted individuals under these laws.

**Violence and Harassment:** Authorities sometimes initiated and condoned harassment of journalists. For instance, on March 5, blogger and Pervomaysk City Telegram channel administrator Dmytro Ivanytskyy reported he received threats of violence from the mayor of Pervomaysk, Mykolayiv Oblast. According to Ivanytskyy, the conflict between him and

the mayor occurred after he published information on a city council decision to increase the mayor's salary. This information, which was also reported by other media outlets, caused a public outcry. The mayor apologized, claiming his words were taken out of context. Police did not investigate Ivanytskyy's allegations.

Government officials at times refused accreditation or access to front-line areas to journalists, citing national security concerns. For example, in June, authorities refused to extend accreditation to cover the war in Ukraine for photojournalist Anton Skyba, working for the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*. The Security Service of Ukraine demanded Skyba pass a lie detector test, accusing him of having a Russian passport and doubting his work reflected the "national interests" of the country. When the issue became public, however, his accreditation to cover the war in Ukraine was extended.

There were reports of government officials threatening to attack journalists. For example, during a March 29 meeting of the Poltava city council, two local officials threatened local journalist Anastasiya Matsko with physical violence. Local police investigated the incident, and the local officials received a notice of suspicion for the threat against the journalist.

There were reports of attacks on journalists who reported on corruption. For example, on July 12, unknown men beat up Volodymyr Sedov, editor in chief of the newspaper *Visti Ananyivshchyny* in the city of Ananyiv, Odesa

Oblast. The victim connected this attack with his professional activities, which included reporting on local government corrupt practices. Prior to the attack, the journalist received numerous threats. Local police launched a criminal investigation.

There were allegations the government threatened to prosecute journalists in retaliation for their work. Additionally, some journalists reported being threatened by security officials with military conscription in retaliation for reporting critical of the administration. Some outlets reported security services placed their employees under surveillance. An investigation was underway, for example, into Security Service of Ukraine surveillance of independent investigative media outlet *Bihus.info*. The *Kyiv Independent* likewise reported its employees were under surveillance by security forces.

### **Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other**

**Media, Including Online Media:** The NGO Freedom House rated the country's press as "partly free." Independent media and internet news sites were active and expressed a wide range of views, but the government took some actions to restrict media and freedom of expression, reportedly to counter Russian disinformation and address other wartime security concerns. Many journalists and media groups reported increased self-censorship as a result, particularly since the start of the full-scale invasion.

Broadcast media consolidated around government-led programming since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion. In 2022, six television stations (1+1,

Ukraina 24, Inter, ICTV, public broadcaster National Public Broadcasting Company, and a government outlet, Rada) started producing around-the-clock coverage in Ukrainian to convey to the public a unified wartime message. Each of the six stations producing content had several hours to fill daily; the outlets produced their own content but coordinated with one another to avoid programming the same commentators.

Media watchdogs expressed concerns the single television broadcast could eventually facilitate government control over broadcasting. They reported there was mutual agreement to limit which politicians appeared on air and to feature some commentators and public figures less actively. Television stations considered to be affiliated with opposition parties, including Channel 5, Pryamyy, and Espresso, did not participate in the unified broadcast, although the three channels voluntarily presented the 24-hour programming by the other channels at times. If a channel refused to reduce its own programming to less than 12 hours to accommodate the livestream, officials retaliated by removing the network from national digital terrestrial frequencies. In June 2022, Pryamyy and Channel 5 filed a lawsuit against the Broadcasting, Radiotelecommunications, and Television Concern and the State Service of Special Communication and Information Protection of Ukraine. As of year's end, the three channels were operating on a pay-for-view basis on the internet.

The largest and most successful privately owned media were owned by

oligarchs, especially television stations.

Media professionals asserted they were denied access to government proceedings by state officials following reporting on sensitive issues. For example, in June, staff of the Odesa Oblast council did not allow journalists Oleksandr Himanov and Vitaliy Prus from the local media platform Dumaska to attend a council session. The editors regarded this as a gross violation of the right to information and freedom of expression and connected it with their critical publications exposing corruption by the head of the council and local officials.

There were instances in which the government practiced censorship, restricted content, and penalized individuals and media outlets for reportedly criticizing measures taken by authorities or expressing pro-Russia views, through imposing financial sanctions, banning websites, and blocking television channels.

Throughout the conflict, both independent and state-owned media periodically engaged in self-censorship when reporting stories that might be deemed insufficiently patriotic by the public or used by Russia for propaganda purposes.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** Libel was a civil offense. While the law limited the monetary damages a plaintiff could claim in a lawsuit, local media observers expressed concern regarding high monetary damages awarded for libel.

Government offices and public figures used the threat of civil suits, sometimes based on alleged damage to a person's "honor and integrity," to influence or intimidate the press. On August 31, the Ministry of Defense filed a lawsuit against journalists who exposed an alleged corruption scheme in procurement. The ministry demanded they refute "false information about the alleged purchase of food for the military at inflated prices."

**National Security:** In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion and concurrent increase in disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks, authorities took measures to prohibit, regulate, and occasionally censor information alleged to be a national security threat, particularly content emanating from Russia and promoting pro-Russia lines or disinformation. Authorities also sanctioned media figures and outlets, as well as banned websites, and prevented media outlets and websites whose messages were deemed to be counter to national security interests from advertising on Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms.

Some media freedom groups claimed the government used national security as a pretext to silence outlets for being critical of its activities. For example, Zaporizhzhia municipal authorities refused to provide journalists from the Center of Investigation with information on road maintenance works carried out in July and August that allegedly cost seven million Ukraine hryvnia (UAH) (\$188,000), citing national security reasons.

**Nongovernmental Impact:** There were reports nongovernment actors

attacked journalists. On March 30, a metropolitan bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church assaulted Espresso TV reporter Valeriya Pashko during an interview with journalists in the Kyiv Pechersk Monastery, shoving her and attempting to knock the microphone from her hands. Hearings continued at year's end against well-known businessman Oleksandr Petrovskyy and members of his security detail, who attacked and threatened *Ukrainska Pravda* journalists in Dnipro in February 2022.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government censored online content, mostly under the guise of wartime national security. Law enforcement bodies monitored the internet, at times without appropriate legal authority, and took significant steps to block access to websites reportedly based on security concerns.

Ukrainian internet providers continued to block websites in accordance with government orders from prior years based on national security concerns. As of late December, 1,152 sites were blocked in the country on such grounds.

The *Myrotvorets* website, which reportedly maintained close ties to the security services, hosted a database of personal information of journalists and public figures whose statements and activities had been deemed unpatriotic.

Freedom House noted in its annual *Freedom on the Net* report in October the continued detrimental impact of Russia's full-scale invasion on internet

freedom in Ukraine. Freedom House cited the damage to Ukraine's internet infrastructure from Russia's attacks, Russia's attempts to reroute internet traffic in occupied territories through Russia's networks in order to block websites, and Russia's cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure in Ukraine among the challenges to Ukraine's internet freedom.

## **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The constitution provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights. Martial law restricted movement, peaceful assembly, and media and introduced curfews. In war time, the country derogated from a number of its international human rights law obligations, including those relating to peaceful assembly.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

Mass gatherings were restricted due to the imposition of martial law. Even prior to the introduction of martial law in 2022, authorities had wide discretion under a Soviet-era directive to grant or refuse permission for assemblies on grounds of protecting public order and safety. Organizers were required to inform authorities in advance of demonstrations.

### **Freedom of Association**

Attacks against civil society were prevalent and often were not sufficiently

investigated. International and domestic human rights NGOs were concerned regarding the lack of accountability for these attacks, which they believed created a climate of impunity. Human Rights NGOs documented 22 cases of violence against civil society representatives in the first nine months of the year, but comprehensive data were unavailable, as many NGOs shifted to documenting conflict-related abuses once the war began.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The constitution and civil code provided citizens with rights to freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government, however, restricted these rights, particularly in the eastern part of the country near the zone of conflict. Under martial law, men ages 18 to 60 were prohibited from leaving the country.

**In-country Movement:** The government and Russia's forces strictly controlled movement between government-controlled areas and Russia-occupied areas. Crossing the line of contact was arduous, with Russia's forces at times reportedly indiscriminately firing on civilian vehicles.

## e. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to IDPs, refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. International and domestic organizations reported the system for protecting asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern did not operate effectively. Of the preinvasion asylum-seeker and refugee population, 75 percent remained in the country, often because they did not have sufficient documentation to leave and were at particular risk among the larger population of IDPs, according to an April UNHCR report.

**Access to Asylum:** Protection for refugees and asylum seekers was insufficient, due to gaps in the law and the system of implementation.

The State Migration Service (SMS) stopped accepting and processing asylum applications following Russia's full-scale invasion though they restarted some SMS activities in March in locations away from hostilities.

Humanitarian organizations expressed concern this limited access to asylum for vulnerable Belarusians and citizens of Russia, who faced barriers to renewing residency in Ukraine and risked deportation.

Human rights groups asserted the refugee law fell short of international standards due to its restrictive implementation of the refugee determination procedure. The law permitted authorities to reject many

asylum applications without a thorough case assessment. In other instances, government officials reportedly declined to accept initial asylum applications without a legal basis, leaving asylum seekers without documentation and vulnerable to frequent police stops, fines, detention, and exploitation. Asylum seekers in detention centers were sometimes unable to apply for refugee status within the prescribed time limits and had limited access to legal and other assistance. Asylum seekers had five days to appeal an order of detention or deportation; some asylum applications were rejected without written notice, depriving asylum seekers of the right to appeal.

A lack of access to qualified interpreters also hampered the full range of asylum procedures. International observers noted that while the government allocated sufficient funding for interpretation, there was a shortage of interpreters trained in some of the languages required by asylum seekers.

**Refoulement:** There were reports the government deported individuals to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Some human rights experts expressed concern that vulnerable citizens of Russia and Belarus were at risk of refoulement due to the cancellation of residence permits and inability to file for asylum.

**Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers:** Authorities frequently detained

asylum seekers for extended periods, including in locations near armed conflict. Some asylum seekers reported being fined when they contacted SMS to apply for asylum.

**Access to Basic Services:** The government had a national plan on the integration of refugees but did not allocate resources for its implementation. In practice, recognized refugees faced difficulty accessing social services and medical care, relying instead on UNHCR and NGO support.

Temporary accommodation centers had a reception capacity of 320 persons and most rented apartments. Asylum seekers living outside an official temporary accommodation center often experienced difficulties obtaining residence registration, and authorities regularly levied substantial fines. According to SMS, refugees could receive residence registration at homeless shelters for up to six months.

According to UNHCR, gaps in housing and social support for unaccompanied children left many without access to state-run accommodation centers or children's shelters. Some children without access to state-run children's shelters had to rely on informal networks for food, shelter, and other needs and were vulnerable to abuse, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation.

**Temporary Protection:** The government provided complementary protection to individuals who might not qualify as refugees. As of

September, authorities had provided complementary protection to 29 persons.

## **f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

According to the IOM, as of September more than five million persons were displaced within the country. The United Nations welcomed the government's commitment to evacuating individuals from war-affected to safer areas where they had access to essential services.

According to the HRMMU, IDPs were largely economically and socially marginalized because of a lack of a national integration strategy or sufficient resources. The IOM reported the influx of individuals and families from different regions created a displacement crisis across the country. This influx put increased strain on public services, goods, housing, and the labor market, as well as on the distribution of humanitarian aid and social protection systems, increasing the potential of tensions between various population groups.

NGOs reported employment discrimination against IDPs. IDPs had difficulty obtaining medical care and necessary documents. According to the law, the government was required to provide IDPs with housing, but authorities did not take effective steps to do so.

Romani activists expressed concern that some Roma could not afford to flee conflict areas, while others had no choice but to leave their homes. An Oxfam Research Report published in September stated lack of identity documents and continued discrimination affected Roma access to humanitarian assistance and public services both as IDPs and as refugees seeking safety outside the country.

### **g. Stateless Persons**

In 2021, UNHCR estimated there were more than 35,000 stateless persons and persons with undetermined nationality in the country. Persons who were either stateless, at risk of statelessness, or with undetermined nationality included Roma, unhoused persons, present and former prisoners, as well as nationals of the former USSR who resided in Ukraine in 1991 but never obtained an endorsement in their Soviet passport indicating they were citizens of Ukraine.

The law required those without a passport endorsement to establish their identity through a court procedure proving their residence in Ukraine in 1991, which could be costly and cumbersome, thereby discouraging some applicants. UNHCR reported Roma were at particular risk for statelessness since many did not have birth certificates or any other type of documentation to verify their identity. Unhoused persons had difficulty obtaining citizenship because of a requirement to produce a document

testifying to one's residence.

The law allowed stateless persons to stay in the country and obtain a residence permit and stateless identity card, which facilitated foreign travel. The law also allocated free legal aid for applicants for the statelessness determination.

### **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution and law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

#### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections:** The country last held parliamentary elections in 2019, which were widely reported to be fair and mostly free of abuses and irregularities. The country last held a presidential election in two rounds in 2019. The joint international election observation mission reported candidates could campaign freely, although numerous and credible indications of misuse of state resources and vote buying undermined the credibility of the process.

The constitution prohibited parliamentary elections during martial law and

legislation similarly prohibited presidential and municipal elections. According to the constitution, the president and parliamentarians retained their powers until the lifting of martial law. Parliamentary elections scheduled for October 26 were postponed due to Russia's full-scale invasion and the resulting declaration of martial law. Civil society widely supported the postponement of elections while under martial law.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** The law permitted the government to ban political parties for persistent collaboration with the Russian Federation.

**Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups:** According to ODIHR, citizens found by a court to be incapacitated “on the basis of intellectual or psychosocial disability” were ineligible to vote. The Central Election Commission estimated this restriction affected 36,000 voters.

## **Section 4. Corruption in Government**

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption and established multiple nominally independent monitoring organizations, but authorities did not always effectively implement the law, and many officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Anti-corruption institutions' heavy workload and mobilization of key staff hampered their capacity to investigate and prosecute corruption cases.

Russia's full-scale invasion led to significant new government expenditures, which provided opportunities for exploitation by corrupt actors. Certain institutions did not complete intended anti-corruption reforms. Actors who benefited from corrupt systems sought to use their influence to undermine reform efforts.

**Corruption:** Throughout the year, the government adopted several pieces of legislation aimed at strengthening anti-corruption institutions.

The Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) hired seven new prosecutors to fill critical staffing vacancies and created seven new prosecutor positions in August to accommodate for their increased workload created by mobilization-related staffing vacancies.

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) appointed a new director and launched 450 investigations that resulted in 41 indictments. Accused individuals included members of parliament, public officials, heads of state-owned enterprises, and seven judges. The Prosecutor General's Office stated seven judges were convicted during the first nine months of the year for soliciting bribes and received sentences of three to seven years in prison. NABU and SAPO conducted investigations and prosecutions despite the wartime context and hurdles. Investigations were sometimes hampered by NABU's lack of authority to perform wiretapping and forensic services, which necessitated outsourcing to unreformed law enforcement bodies. Moreover, unreformed law enforcement institutions sometimes challenged

or encroached upon NABU's jurisdiction in high-profile corruption investigations.

Civil society and media noted corruption remained common at all levels in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, influencing judicial and law enforcement institutions, the management of state property and state companies, and state regulation.

Antireform elites and oligarchs continued to pressure anti-corruption bodies by using misinformation campaigns and political maneuvering to undermine public trust as well as stall progress on reforms. Human rights groups called for increased transparency and discussion regarding proposed changes to these bodies, particularly respecting procedures for appointments to leadership positions.

The government appointed a new supervisory board with open and transparent competition for Naftogaz, the country's largest state-owned oil and gas company. The government eliminated the District Administrative Court of Kyiv due to corruption concerns, banned several pro-Russian political parties, and seized a number of strategic enterprises such as Ukrnafta (an oil and natural gas extracting company), Rusal (an aluminum production company), and Tytan Ukraina (a titanium production company), among others.

NABU exposed the head of the State Judicial Administration, Oleksiy

Salnikov, for arranging illegal benefits for Supreme Court judges in exchange for a ruling in favor of a commercial enterprise. According to the investigation, on March 5, Salnikov received \$7,500 for his services. The investigation continued as of November.

Following legislation adopted by parliament in July 2022, the High Council of Justice (HCJ) relaunched the work of the High Qualification Commission of Judges after a delay of almost four years. These bodies respectively controlled the hiring of judges and oversaw judicial self-governance. The HCJ Ethics Council nominated qualified candidates to both bodies. As of November, however, four HCJ vacancies remained.

The government took increased action against official corruption, completing multiple high-level corruption investigations and making several arrests; nevertheless, media and civil society groups continued to report significant levels of official corruption.

On May 15, anti-corruption authorities detained Supreme Court Chairperson Vsevolod Knyazev for allegedly accepting a \$2.7 million bribe from billionaire former parliamentarian Kostyantyn Zhevago, who allegedly bribed Knyazev and other Supreme Court judges in exchange for a decision in his favor. As of October, Knyazev remained in pretrial detention.

For additional information about corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and

the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The constitution provided for a human rights ombudsperson, officially designated as the parliamentary commissioner on human rights. The Ombudsperson's Office cooperated closely with NGOs on projects to monitor human rights practices in various institutions, including detention facilities, orphanages, boarding schools for children, and geriatric institutions. The office advocated for political prisoners held by Russia, Crimean Tatars, Roma, IDPs, and persons with disabilities. The office was generally independent and effective.

## Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

### Women

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law prohibited domestic violence and rape of a person, regardless of gender, including spousal rape but did not include corrective rape. The penalty for rape was three to 15 years' imprisonment. Sexual assault and rape continued to be significant problems. The law prohibited domestic violence, which was punishable by fines, restraining orders (from one day to six months), administrative arrest, and community service.

Human rights groups reported police often failed to effectively enforce these laws. Domestic violence against women remained a serious problem. In the first eight months of the year, police received more than 192,000 domestic violence complaints. Intimate partner violence was common. According to the Office of the Prosecutor General, approximately 4,580 cases of domestic violence were investigated during the first nine months of the year. Human rights groups noted the ability of agencies to detect and report cases of domestic violence was limited.

According to La Strada Ukraine, an NGO working on antitrafficking and domestic violence, Russia's invasion led to a surge in gender-based violence across the country. Human rights groups attributed the increase in violence to posttraumatic stress experienced by IDPs fleeing the conflict and by

soldiers returning from combat.

IDPs reported numerous instances of rape and sexual abuse by Russia's forces; many said they fled areas controlled by Russia forces because they feared sexual abuse. Conflict-related sexual violence was rampant in Russia-occupied areas.

Proceedings continued at year's end in Solomyanskyy District Court in Kyiv in the case of Russian soldier Mikhail Romanov, accused of killing a man and raping a woman in the village of Bohdanivka, Kyiv Oblast, in March 2022. The accused was being tried in absentia.

As of October, the government operated 54 shelters for survivors of domestic violence and 55 centers for social and psychological aid as well as 57 crisis rooms across the country for survivors of domestic violence and child abuse.

**Discrimination:** While the law provided for the same legal status and rights for women as for men, women experienced discrimination in employment. According to the Ministry of Economy, men earned on average 20 percent more than women. The Ministry of Health maintained a list of 50 occupations closed to women.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

According to the ombudsperson, many health workers either were internally displaced during the war or left for other countries, with the result being reduced or, in some locations, nonexistent reproductive and other essential health services. Russian attacks on medical facilities in Ukraine directly impacted access of the right to health care for women in need of perinatal care. Some telehealth services were offered, especially in war-affected areas, but those in need often lacked internet access. This disproportionately affected women in rural areas. Women with disabilities and minorities often did not have access to medical care and in particular reproductive health care.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence, and emergency contraception was available as part of the clinical management of rape. Postexposure prophylaxis was available at hospitals, but its availability was sometimes hampered by the war's strain on medical facilities. Human rights groups stated these services were sometimes unreliable and often did not reach Romani communities. Romani women sometimes faced barriers in managing their reproductive health, including segregation in maternity wards and other forms of discrimination.

According to UN Women, health-care providers sometimes refused to provide adequate reproductive health services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) women due to anti-LGBTQI+

sentiment or lack of expertise.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution prohibited any restriction of rights based on race, skin color, language, and other characteristics, while the law criminalized intentional acts provoking hatred and hostility based on nationality or race. The law also provided for designating racial or national as aggravating circumstances to criminal offenses. Laws protecting members of racial or ethnic minorities from violence and discrimination were not effectively enforced. Human rights groups reported police often failed to properly apply these laws when investigating attacks on members of minority groups.

Mistreatment of members of minority groups and harassment of foreigners of non-Slavic appearance was a problem. Human rights organizations stated the requirement to prove actual intent, including proof of premeditation, to secure a conviction made it difficult to apply the laws against offenses motivated by racial or national hatred. Police and prosecutors continued to prosecute racially motivated crimes under laws against hooliganism or related offenses.

In September, parliament amended the Law on National Minorities, permitting national minorities to broadcast, advertise, and hold public events in their native languages in their communities of residence. In December, parliament adopted further amendments to national minority

legislation, giving national minorities the right to study in secondary schools in their native language if it was an EU language; under the new law, classes on Ukrainian language, Ukrainian literature, the history of Ukraine, and the defense of Ukraine had to be taught in Ukrainian.

The most frequent reports of societal violence against national, racial, and ethnic minorities were against Roma. Human rights activists were concerned regarding the lack of accountability in cases of attacks on Roma and the government's failure to address societal violence and harassment against them.

Roma continued to face governmental and societal discrimination and significant barriers accessing education, health care, social services, and employment. A May survey by the Romani women's foundation Chirikli, however, revealed that anti-Roma prejudice from local authorities, social services, medical and educational facilities had decreased since the start of the full-scale invasion.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

Crimean Tatars continued to experience serious governmental and societal violence and discrimination in Russia-occupied Crimea (see occupied areas subreport).

## Children

**Birth Registration:** Registration of children born in Crimea or other Russia-occupied areas was difficult. Authorities required hospital documents to register births. Russia's occupation authorities or Russia-led forces routinely withheld such documents, making it difficult for the child to obtain a Ukrainian birth certificate. In addition, Ukrainian authorities did not recognize documents issued by Russia's occupation authorities in Crimea or in territories controlled by Russia-led proxy forces. Persons living in Crimea and areas controlled by Russia had to present documents obtained in Russia-occupied territory to Ukrainian courts to receive Ukrainian government-issued documents. The courts were obliged to make rulings in 24 hours; these decisions were then carried out by the registry office. Due to the lack of judges in local courts, Ukrainians living in regions under Russia's control faced serious difficulty in obtaining Ukrainian documents.

**Child Abuse:** The law criminalized child abuse, with penalties ranging from three years to life in prison. The law criminalized sexual relations between adults and persons younger than 16; violations were punishable by imprisonment of up to five years. The criminal code qualified sexual relations with a person younger than 14 as rape. Human rights groups noted authorities lacked the capability to detect violence against children and refer victims for assistance. Preventive services were underdeveloped. There were also instances of forced labor involving children.

Authorities did not take effective measures to protect children from abuse and violence and to prevent such problems. According to the law, parents were the legal representatives of their children, even if they perpetrated violence against them. There was no procedure for appointing a temporary legal representative for a child while parents were being investigated for alleged parental violence.

According to press reports, on May 1, a man stabbed his daughter to death and attempted to poison his son, age 12, in Obukhiv, Kyiv Oblast. Police detained the father. The investigation continued at year's end.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The minimum age for marriage was 18. A court could grant permission to a child as young as 16 to marry if it found marriage to be in the child's interest. Romani rights groups reported early marriages involving girls younger than 18 were common in the Romani community. The government enforced the law effectively.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibited the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the sale of children, offering or procuring a child for commercial sex, and practices related to child pornography, and authorities enforced the law. The minimum prison sentence for rape of a child was eight years. Molesting a child younger than 16 was punishable by imprisonment for up to five years. The same offense committed against a child younger than 14 was punishable by imprisonment for five to eight years. The age of consent was 16.

According to the law, the deliberate use, production, sale, or distribution of child pornography was punishable by imprisonment for up to three years. Sexual exploitation of children remained significantly underreported. Commercial sexual exploitation of children was a serious problem. In February, a court in Ukrainka, Kyiv Oblast, sentenced a man to nine years in prison for producing pornographic content with children. He produced approximately 10,000 prohibited photographs and videos. The court established that the man abused 43 children.

Domestic and foreign law enforcement officials reported a significant amount of child pornography on the internet originated in the country. The IOM reported children from socially disadvantaged families and those in state custody continued to be at high risk of commercial sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking and the production of pornography. For example, on March 29, police detained a woman and her partner on suspicion of molesting her daughter, age 12, in Zakarpattya. The investigation established the mother was involved in committing sexual crimes against the child. The mobile phone of one of the suspects contained pornographic videos with the participation of both adults and the child.

## **Antisemitism**

According to census data and international Jewish groups, the Jewish population was approximately 105,000, constituting approximately 0.25

percent of the total population. According to the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities, there were approximately 300,000 persons of Jewish ancestry in the country, including President Zelenskyy.

The law defined the concept of antisemitism and established punishment for crimes motivated by antisemitism. The law also established punishment for making false or stereotypical statements regarding persons of Jewish origin, producing, or disseminating materials containing antisemitic statements or content, and denying the facts of the persecution and mass killing of Jews during the Holocaust. Antisemitism was also listed as a punishable hate crime in the criminal code.

In September, a resident of Khrystynivka, Cherkasy Oblast, posted photographs and text on a social network insulting Jews and inciting racial hatred. Local police investigated the case and transferred the indictment to the Cherkassy court under charges of violation of the equality of citizens on racial, national, regional grounds, religious beliefs, disability, and on other grounds. The suspect faced up to three years of prison with deprivation of the right to hold certain offices or engage in certain activities for up to three years.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics**

**Criminalization:** The law did not criminalize same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behavior. There were no reports of other facially neutral laws that were disproportionately applied to LGBTQI+ persons to justify arrest.

**Violence and Harassment:** Human Rights NGO Nash Svit reported the total number of cases of discrimination, hate crimes, and other violations of LGBTQI+ rights showed a downward trend during the year, as it had for several previous years.

On August 15, a man beat a transgender woman in the military in Lviv. Reportedly she was talking to her friend on a telephone when a man started abusing her verbally and then hit her in the nose. Police investigated the case under charges violating equality of citizens; a criminal case was opened in court in September.

Organizers of the international LGBTQI+ film festival Sunny Bunny, held June 22-28 in Kyiv, received numerous threats to set fire to the cinemas screening the festival program.

Nash Svit noted criminal proceedings for attacks against LGBTQI+ persons

were rarely classified under criminal provisions pertaining to hate crimes, which carried heavier penalties. For instance, on May 28, a group of youths attacked Daniel Skrypnyk in Kyiv because of his sexual orientation. Police reportedly failed to respond to Skrypnyk's call and opened an investigation only after he filed a complaint. The two attackers were eventually arrested and charged with hooliganism.

**Discrimination:** The law prohibited discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The labor code prohibited workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity; however, discrimination was reportedly widespread in employment, housing, education, and other sectors for members of the LGBTQI+ community. Marriage equality was not recognized by law.

In May, parliament amended the Law on Advertising, prohibiting job advertisements from making demands on a number of grounds, including sexual orientation.

During Pride Month, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs displayed their logos on their social media pages in the rainbow colors as a sign of solidarity with LGBTQI+ persons.

A national poll published in December indicated an improvement in the public perception of LGBTQI+ persons, with 73 percent of respondents

stating LGBTQI+ persons should be protected from discrimination, 46 percent supporting same-sex marriages, 10 percent undecided, and 36 percent opposed. The report indicated 59 percent of respondents supported civil partnership, 9 percent uncertain, and 25 percent opposed.

Nash Svit reported that the country's mass media, for the most part, very actively and positively covered the participation of openly LGBTQI+ persons in the war against Russia and the introduction of legislation for registered civil partnerships.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** Legal gender recognition was available in the country, although not by self-determination. Medical intervention was required under the law. Legal gender could be changed upon obtaining a medical certificate based on medical-biological and sociopsychological indications. Although the law permitted it, transgender persons often reported difficulties obtaining official documents reflecting their gender identity, resulting in discrimination in health care, education, and other areas.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** The state did not conduct or ban involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices on LGBTQI+ persons to change their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. According to Freedom House's 2020 survey on the nature and distribution of conversion therapy in the country, leaders of religious groups (89 percent) and family members (75 percent) were the

main promoters of conversion therapy. According to the respondents, the main “doctors” were representatives of religious groups (84 percent), “traditional doctors” (57 percent), and private psychological and psychiatric clinics (45 percent). The survey noted “conversion therapy” was primarily aimed at LGBTQI+ adolescents younger than 18 (67 percent), and the main forms of “treatment” were religious rites (59 percent), prayer (54 percent), and a stay in a special institution (51 percent). Nonbinary persons also mentioned physical violence as a form of such “therapy” (60 percent). According to the survey, “conversion therapy” in the country was based on the belief that homosexuality was a medical or psychological problem that could be “cured.”

There were no reports of surgeries performed on minors or nonconsenting adult intersex persons. The government or medical associations made efforts to limit these practices.

### **Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:**

Under martial law, authorities restricted public assemblies and gatherings; however, these did not specifically target LGBTQI+ matters, organizations, persons, or communities. According to a June Nash Svit report on conditions for LGBTQI+ persons, police improved protection of public events from violent far-right attacks but ineffectively investigated hate crimes. Prior to the Russian full-scale invasion that led to a ban on large, public gatherings for safety reasons, major LGBTQI+ events took place without

significant incident.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law required employers to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities, but the government generally did not enforce the law. Persons with disabilities were often unable to access public venues, health services, information, communications, transportation, the judicial system, or opportunities for involvement in public, educational, cultural, and sporting activities on an equal basis with others.

Advocacy groups maintained that, despite the legal requirements, most public buildings remained inaccessible to persons with disabilities.

By law employers had to set aside 4 percent of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. NGOs noted many of those employed to satisfy the requirement received nominal salaries but did not actually perform work at their companies.

The law provided every child with a disability the right to study at mainstream secondary schools (which usually included primary, middle, and high school-level education) as well as for the creation of inclusive groups in preschool facilities, secondary and vocational schools, and colleges. The majority of students with disabilities attending school did so online due to the war.

Patients in psychiatric institutions remained at risk of abuse, and many psychiatric hospitals continued to use outdated and unsafe methods and treatments. On April 13, a monitoring group from the Ombudsperson's Office identified abuses at the Leshkivskyy psychoneurological facility, Lviv Oblast. Patients did not provide their written informed consent for treatment, and they had no evaluation by a medical advisory commission. Individuals were not allowed to have, use, or dispose of their own possessions and funds. The facility was overpopulated. Some residents had limited access to drinking water and fresh air due to inaccessibility.

Law enforcement agencies generally took appropriate measures to punish those responsible for violence against persons with disabilities.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The constitution provided for freedom of association as a fundamental right and established the right to participate in independent trade unions. The law provided the right for most workers to form and join independent unions, to bargain collectively, and to conduct legal strikes.

On February 23, parliament adopted a Law on Collective Agreement. It modernized the collective bargaining procedures and allowed minority

unions to join collective bargaining agreements. The law was to enter into force six months after the cancellation of martial law. The law, however, established low penalties for noncompliance with collective bargaining agreements by employers. The low penalties were insufficient to ensure employers complied with collective bargaining agreements, making it easier to pay a penalty than to launch negotiations. On July 14, parliament passed a law establishing additional administrative liability and increased fines for parties of collective agreements for ignoring or avoiding participation in collective negotiations. The law, which was to take effect after the cancellation of martial law, stipulated the fine would not be imposed on social parties at enterprises with fewer than 25 workers. Unions had expressed the opinion that this threshold was too high and did not correspond with the threshold imposed by the Law on Collective Bargaining Agreements, which was 10 workers.

There were no laws or legal mechanisms to prevent antiunion discrimination, although the labor code required employers to provide justification for layoffs and firings, and union activity was not an acceptable justification. Legal recourse was available for reinstatement, back wages, and punitive damages, although observers described court enforcement as arbitrary and unpredictable, with damages too low to create incentives for compliance on the part of employers.

The law contained several limits to freedom of association and the right to

collective bargaining. Worker organizations considered several laws excessively complex and contradictory. Two laws established the status of trade unions as legal entities only after state registration. Under another law, a trade union was considered a legal entity upon adoption of its statute. The inherent conflict between these laws created obstacles for workers seeking to form trade unions. Unions also reported significant bureaucratic hurdles in the registration process, including the payment of notary fees and requirements to visit as many as 10 different government offices.

Due to the war, information was not available regarding the effectiveness of enforcement of laws providing for freedom of association and collective bargaining, including the frequency of when penalties were applied and whether penalties were commensurate with those under other laws involving denials of civil rights.

Worker organizations stated the legal procedure to initiate a strike was complex and significantly hindered strike action, artificially lowering the numbers of informal industrial actions. The legal process for industrial disputes required initial consultation, conciliation and mediation, and labor arbitration allowing involved parties to draw out the process for months. Workers could vote to strike only after completion of this process, a decision the courts could still block. The requirement that a large percentage of the workforce (two-thirds of general workers' meeting delegates or 50 percent of workers in an enterprise) had to vote in favor of a strike before it could be

called further restricted the right to strike. The government could also deny workers the right to strike on national security grounds or to protect the health or “rights and liberties” of citizens. The law prohibited strikes by broad categories of workers, including personnel in the Office of the Prosecutor General, the judiciary, the armed forces, the security services, law enforcement agencies, the transportation sector, and the public-service sector.

Martial law restricted the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens and specifically prohibited workers from public protest and strikes. In March 2022, the Law on Organizing Labor Relations under Martial Law came into effect, clarifying relevant restrictions on constitutional rights and freedoms. In accordance with this law, employers could unilaterally suspend certain provisions of the collective bargaining agreement.

In August 2022, President Zelenskyy signed a law limiting collective bargaining rights for workers for any employer with 250 or fewer employees while martial law remained in effect. The law empowered employers to negotiate almost all conditions of employment (including but not limited to wages, hours, leave, and conditions of work) through individual contracts with employees. The law also allowed employers to ignore terms of existing collective agreements in individual employment contracts. Ukrainian and European trade unions suggested it could “infringe upon international labor standards.” The law was passed with an amendment that it would only

apply during martial law, and governing party members of parliament insisted the law was passed as a stop-gap wartime measure.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

## **d. Discrimination (see section 6)**

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The minimum wage was set simultaneously in monthly and hourly amounts. The minimum wage was a state social guarantee, mandatory throughout the country for enterprises of all forms of ownership and management and individuals who used the labor of employees, under any system of payment. The minimum wage was set at an amount not lower than the national poverty line.

The law provided that normal working hours of employees could not exceed

40 hours per week. During martial law, a normal workweek could be increased to 60 hours for critical workers in infrastructure. In August 2022, the president signed a law introducing private contracts between employers and employees and removing previously stringent restrictions on firing. It permitted all employers to hire up to 10 percent of their workforce on contracts with nonfixed work time, or “zero-hour” contracts, under which employees were required to be “on call” each day for work assigned but could be assigned as few as 32 hours per month.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The law required employers to provide appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards. Employers sometimes ignored these regulations due to the lack of enforcement or strict imposition of penalties. The law provided workers the right to remove themselves from dangerous working conditions without jeopardizing their continued employment. Employers in the metal and mining industries often violated the rule and retaliated against workers by pressuring them to quit.

Despite active fighting with Russia’s forces, especially in the Ukrainian government-controlled industrial areas of eastern and southern regions of the country, enterprises involved in mining, energy, media, retail, clay production, and transportation continued to operate, although at reduced outputs due to continued Russian attacks. The armed conflict resulted in extensive damage to mines and plants, the loss of electricity, destroyed transformers, physical damage from shelling, and alleged intentional

flooding of mines by combined Russia-led forces. Miners were especially vulnerable, as losses of electrical power could strand them underground. The loss of electrical power also threatened the operability of mine safety equipment that prevented the buildup of explosive gases.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The State Labor Service (SLS) was responsible for enforcing wage, hour, and OSH laws and regularly applied penalties when employers failed to resolve violations after receiving their first SLS warning. The government did not effectively enforce OSH laws, and penalties were not commensurate with those of other similar crimes. While statistics were unavailable on the number of inspectors and funding available to enforce compliance, in previous years both were insufficient.

After a hiatus following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the SLS partially resumed inspections.

Under martial law, if an employer eliminated the violations found during an inspection, the fines provided for in the labor code were not applied; at the same time, penalties were applied regularly if the violations were not fixed after the warning. Also, the SLS provided information and advised employees and employers regarding the requirements of the legislation on labor and labor protection under martial law. There were also active information campaigns on preventing undeclared work and labor trafficking.

Due to the war, up-to-date statistics on the informal sector were

unavailable. In 2021, the Ombudsperson’s Office and State Statistics Service estimated the informally employed population (ages 15 to 70) numbered three million. Due to Russia’s full-scale invasion and resulting elimination of jobs and mass internal and external migration, it was likely that the number of individuals employed in the informal sector remained the same or was higher than in previous years. Informal workers were not covered by wage, hour, or OSH laws and inspections.

## **Russia-occupied Areas**

In February 2014, Russia’s forces occupied Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, holding a sham referendum to claim annexation in violation of Ukraine’s constitution and international law. The same year, Russia’s proxies set up “independent republics” in Ukraine’s Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts.

In February 2022 following the “recognition of the independence” of these “republics,” Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in violation of international law. Russia again conducted sham referenda in Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson Oblasts in September 2022 in violation of Ukraine’s constitution, and Russia’s President Putin signed accession paperwork that purported to recognize the four additional territories as part of Russia. Multiple UN General Assembly resolutions condemned Russia’s actions and adopted a policy of nonrecognition of Russia’s claims. In March 2022, the UN Human Rights Council resolved to urgently establish an

Independent International Commission of Inquiry to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights, as well as violations of international humanitarian law and related crimes in the context of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. On April 4, the council extended the Commission of Inquiry's mandate for an additional year.

For detailed information on the laws and practices of the Russian Federation, see the *Country Report on Human Rights for Russia*. Abuses by Russia's forces in Ukrainian territory liberated from Russian control during the reporting period are described in the main body of the Ukraine country report, and not duplicated here.

## **Executive Summary**

Significant human rights issues in the occupied areas included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; enforced disappearances; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by Russia's forces or Russia-led proxies; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and transfer of prisoners to Russia; unjust detention; serious problems with the independence of the occupation's "judiciary"; political prisoners or detainees; unjust interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including attacks on civilian infrastructure and cities, resulting in widespread civilian death, enforced disappearances or abductions, forcible transfers of civilian

populations, torture, physical abuses, and conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjust arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; severe restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement; inability of citizens to freely change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; forced participation in sham “elections” organized by Russia in violation of international law; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious acts of corruption; serious restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including rape; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups or Indigenous persons, including Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and prohibiting independent trade unions or significant or systematic restrictions on workers’ freedom of association.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were numerous, documented reports of Russia's forces or their proxies committing arbitrary or unlawful killings in all occupied areas, including Crimea, Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, during the year.

The OHCHR's June report cited 77 known summary executions of civilians by Russia's forces during arbitrary detention between February 2022 and May 2023, as well as the death of one detainee due to torture, inhuman detention conditions, and denial of necessary medical care.

Impunity for Russia's forces' past killings in Crimea was a serious problem. The Russian government tasked the Russian Investigative Committee with investigating whether security force killings in occupied Crimea were justifiable and whether to pursue prosecutions. The HRMMU reported the Russian Investigative Committee failed to take adequate steps to prosecute or punish officials who committed abuses, resulting in a climate of impunity. The Office of the Prosecutor of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea also investigated security force killings from its headquarters in Kyiv, but de facto restrictions on access to occupied Crimea limited its effectiveness. Human

rights observers reported families frequently did not challenge findings in such cases due to fear of retaliation.

On January 20, Russian military forces came to the house of Kostyantyn Kovalevskyy, a resident of the temporarily occupied village of Komysh-Zorya, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, and reportedly killed him after searching his home.

On September 16, Russia's military forces abducted and killed a young couple, Anastasiya and Valeriy Saksahanskyy, in the village of Mali Kopani, Kherson Oblast. Relatives of the deceased alleged they were killed as retribution for their refusal to adopt Russian passports or cooperate with occupation authorities.

In its June report, the UNHRMMU corroborated the authenticity of videos showing members of Russian armed forces torturing and summarily executing two Ukrainian POWs. In one video, a POW was shot, and in the second, a POW was beheaded.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were reports of disappearances by or on behalf of Russia and Russia-led occupation authorities. Occupation authorities denied international monitors, including the OHCHR and the OSCE, access to the occupied areas, which made it impossible for monitors to fully investigate disappearances. Human rights groups reported de facto police often refused to register reports of disappearances and intimidated and threatened with detention

those who tried to report it. The Ukrainian government and human rights groups believed Russia's security forces kidnapped individuals for opposing Russia's occupation as a measure to instill fear in the population and prevent dissent.

The OHCHR reported occupation authorities had not prosecuted anyone in relation to the forced disappearances from Crimea since 2014. NGO and press reports widely reported that occupation authorities were responsible for the disappearances. For example, in 2014 Revolution of Dignity activists Ivan Bondarets and Valeriy Vashchuk telephoned relatives to report police in Simferopol, Crimea, had detained them at a railway station for displaying a Ukrainian flag. Relatives had no communication with them since, and the whereabouts of the two men remained unknown.

The OHCHR documented 996 individual cases of arbitrary detention perpetrated by Russia's forces from February 2022 to July. Eighty detainees died in detention or were found dead with signs of violence, 468 remained in arbitrary detention. Ukrainian government and civil society sources indicated that, in total, tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians had been detained by Russia's forces.

Russia's military forces detained individuals during "filtration" operations in occupied territory, a process used to seek to identify possible affiliation with or support for the Ukrainian armed forces or authorities and to collect information regarding residents in occupied territory. According to the

OHCHR, detentions during “filtration” were in most cases arbitrary and in some cases amounted to the enforced disappearance of individuals. Russia’s military and their proxies often detained civilians over suspicions regarding their political views, particularly related to pro-Ukrainian sentiments, or other legitimate exercise of freedom of expression. This included local public officials, civil society activists, humanitarian volunteers, and informal leaders of communities, including teachers and priests. Russia’s forces held civilian detainees for periods ranging from several days to weeks or months, often incommunicado, in unofficial places of detention. The Ukrainian NGO ZMINA documented 562 cases of abduction between February 2022 and June. The largest number of abductions took place in Kherson and Donetsk Oblasts.

Examples included the disappearance of civilian Leonid Popov in occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast in April. Russia’s forces held him in the building of the former traffic police for allegedly taking a photograph of Russian military equipment. Russia’s forces beat, starved, and deprived him of water. After three months of captivity, Popov was released due to the lack of criminal charges, after which he was admitted to a hospital for exhaustion. On August 2, after his release from the hospital, Russia’s forces detained him again. As of October, his whereabouts were unknown.

On March 17, unidentified men abducted Tair Seydametov from the village of Ukromne, Crimea; he was detained and held incommunicado in a Russian

Federal Security Service (FSB) building in Simferopol.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

Russia's forces reportedly employed systematic torture and abuse against the thousands of captured Ukrainian military POWs and detained civilians. Nearly all released captives recounted torture and other physical abuse at the hands of Russia's forces, according to a July report by the OHCHR. Detainees were routinely held incommunicado and in official places of detention, where they were tortured, including through the use of sexual violence, to extract forced confessions, disclose information, or compel cooperation. The OHCHR reported conditions of detention were so dire they could be considered forms of torture under international law. In its October report, the OHCHR documented six additional cases of summary executions of Ukrainian POWs. Of the 56 Ukrainian service members interviewed by the OHCHR between February 1 and July 31, 51 said they were subjected to various forms of torture and mistreatment. According to multiple sources, Russia's forces systematically tortured a subset of civilians and POWs prior to execution. The organization also reported multiple Ukrainian POWs and detainees died as a consequence of poor detention conditions.

There were numerous reports documenting inhuman and degrading

treatment of detainees by Russia's forces and their proxies in Crimea, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts. Human rights monitors reported occupation authorities also threatened individuals with violence or imprisonment if they did not testify in court against individuals whom authorities believed were opposed to the occupation. Ukraine's national police identified 52 torture chambers in liberated areas. Most were located in Kharkiv and Kherson Oblasts. According to ZMINA, Russia's forces employed torture against civilians as a tool of suppressing resistance. Tactics included electrocution, beatings, psychological abuse, and forcing individuals to witness the torture of other detainees.

According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, "[t]he use of torture by the FSB [Federal Security Service] and the Russia-led forces against Ukrainian citizens became a systematic and unpunished phenomenon after Russia's occupation of Crimea." Human rights monitors reported Russia's occupation authorities particularly subjected Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians to physical abuse. For example, on May 30, FSB officers detained Kyrylo Barannyk in Simferopol. They reportedly put a plastic bag over his head and brought him to the FSB office. During the interrogation, law enforcement officers tortured him with electric current and simulated drowning with his hands and legs tied with tape. Torture sessions often lasted for as long as six hours. FSB officers threatened to rape Barannyk and kill his mother if he did not confess to a crime. He was charged with damaging railway tracks on February 23 in the village of Poshtove.

According to Ukrainian news sources, on July 18, Russia's forces abducted Serhiy Spartesnyy, an employee of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, and took him to the local occupation police station. Occupation authorities reportedly searched his digital records, including computers, telephones, and social media networks. Spartesnyy remained in detention as of November 26, and occupation authorities had not released any information on charges brought against him or his medical state.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison and detention center conditions in Crimea, and in Donetsk, Kherson, Lugansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts reportedly remained harsh and life threatening due to overcrowding, poor conditions, lack of heating and medical care, poor food quality, and insufficient potable water.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** According to the Ukraine 5 AM Coalition, occupation authorities maintained an extensive network of unofficial detention centers in the Russia-occupied areas, mainly located in basements, sewage wells, garages, and industrial enterprises. According to ZMINA, women detainees were denied medical care, including sexual and reproductive health care. OHCHR documented poor conditions of detention in many unofficial places of detention. It interviewed 65 detainees held in such places of detention; 17 of them reported that they often had to sleep on the floor or sitting on chairs and were not provided with sufficient food. In several cases, the detainee's hands were tied overnight or were strapped

to radiators.

According to a May report by the UN secretary-general on the situation in Crimea, Russian law enforcement officers “subjected the victims to torture and ill-treatment, with a view to extracting information, including passwords for their electronic devices, and obtaining self-incriminating statements or testimony against third persons. The methods included beatings with bare hands or wooden sticks, suffocation, the twisting [of] arms or fingers, the use of electric shocks to various body parts, including the earlobes, nipples, and genitals.”

Russian authorities reportedly failed to provide proper medical care to Ukrainian detainees; as a result, detainees Kostyantyn Shyryng and Dzhemil Hafarov died in prisons in February.

Prison authorities reportedly retaliated against detainees who refused Russian Federation citizenship by placing them in smaller cells or in solitary confinement.

**Administration:** Authorities generally did not investigate allegations of torture and mistreatment. Authorities sometimes did not allow prisoners and detainees access to visitors or religious observance. According to defense lawyers, prisoners considered Russian citizens by the Russian Federation were denied Ukrainian consular visits, and most Crimean residents were transferred to prison facilities in Russia without Ukrainian

passports.

**Independent Monitoring:** Occupation authorities did not permit independent nongovernmental observers or international organizations to monitor prison or detention center conditions. Occupation authorities appointed a proxy “ombudsperson,” Lyudmyla Lubina, and permitted her access to prisoners in Crimea. Human rights activists regarded Lubina as representing the interests of Russia’s occupation authorities and did not view her as credible. The HRMMU, COI, and OSCE experts continued to be denied access to detainees in Crimea or those held by Russia-led forces in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia, preventing investigations of what these organizations described as credible claims of torture and abuse in detention centers with conditions that did not meet international human rights standards.

## **d. Unjust Detention**

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in Crimea and the occupied parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

**Unjust Detention:** Unjust detention of civilians was endemic in Russia-

occupied areas of Ukraine. According to the OHCHR, victims of unjust detentions by Russia and its proxies after Russia's full-scale invasion were held incommunicado in unofficial places of detention, including warehouses and barns, without access to relatives and lawyers. Some of these individuals were later transferred to Russian territory. According to its June report, the OHCHR located 161 places of detention used to confine conflict-related detainees. Of those, 124 were located in occupied territory of Ukraine, including five places in Crimea; 35 places of detention were pretrial detention facilities, penitentiary colonies, or temporary camps located in Russia. The OHCHR also identified two places in Belarus used by Russian forces as temporary or transit places of detention for conflict-related detainees and for POWs transferred from the northern regions of Ukraine.

Observers described unjust detention as a policy tool to instill fear, stifle opposition, and inflict punishment on those who opposed the occupation. According to the HRMMU, Russia's forces focused on Crimean Tatars and raided homes of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On January 24, Russian security forces conducted raids in six households in Dzhankoy District. Human rights groups reported occupation authorities prevented those detained and their family members from calling lawyers during the raids. Occupation authorities detained six men on charges of participating in Hizb ut-Tahrir, which was banned in Russia as a "terrorist" group but was legal in Ukraine. Occupation authorities failed to properly

identify themselves and refused to inform family members where the men were being taken. Ukrainian government officials rejected the charges against the men as politically motivated. According to human rights defenders, justifications underpinning the detention of alleged members of “terrorist” or “extremist” groups often provided little to no evidence that the suspect posed an actual threat to society by planning or undertaking concrete actions.

Failure to submit to conscription into Russia’s armed forces was also used as a basis for unjust detentions. Since 2015 Russia conducted annual spring and fall conscriptions in Crimea, and failure to comply was punishable by criminal penalty. As of September 30, the Crimean Tatar Resource Center estimated more than 60,000 Crimean residents had been conscripted to service in Russia’s forces since the beginning of 2014. As of September 30, the Crimean Tatar Resource Center documented 10 criminal and 600 administrative cases brought against Crimean residents for evading military service in Russia’s armed forces. On September 29, Russian Federation President Putin signed a decree to conscript 130,000 personnel into the Russian armed forces from October to December, with conscription taking place in all occupied areas of Ukraine. The HRMMU noted in an October report that conscription of protected persons was a grave breach of article 147 of Geneva Convention IV.

## **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

Under Russia's occupation authorities, the judicial system was neither independent nor impartial. Judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys were subject to political directives, and the outcomes of trials appeared predetermined by occupation authorities. The HRMMU noted lawyers defending individuals accused of extremism or terrorism risked facing harassment or similar charges themselves.

On August 16, the "Donetsk People's Republic (DPR)" so-called court found guilty and sentenced Pavlo Artemenko and Anton Romanyuk, POWs from Azovstal, to 24 years in prison. They were charged with "shelling residential buildings of the 'DPR' in spring 2022." Both men were members of the Azov Battalion, a Ukrainian armed forces unit that fought Russian troops in and around Mariupol.

The OHCHR expressed concern that "courts" in occupied areas "continued to sentence civilians for conflict-related crimes in proceedings that did not meet international fair trial standards and could thus amount to war crimes." Human rights groups reported that de facto occupation authorities widely practiced intimidation, pressure, and harassment of lawyers for their professional activities.

## Trial Procedures

Occupation authorities did not observe the right to a trial without undue delay and the right to legal counsel. The Ukrainian government's lack of access to Russia-occupied areas complicated investigations into human rights violations and abuses there. Perpetrators of such violations and abuses were rarely held accountable. Russia and Russia-led forces terminated Ukrainian court system functions in areas under their control. Occupied territories did not have an independent judiciary, and the right to a fair trial was systematically restricted. The HRMMU reported that in many cases individuals were not provided with any judicial review of their detention and were detained indefinitely without any charges or trial.

In cases of suspected espionage or when individuals were suspected of having links to the Ukrainian government, closed-door trials by military "tribunals" were held. The "courts" widely relied on confessions reportedly obtained through torture and other forms of coercion. There were nearly no opportunities to appeal the verdicts of these tribunals. Observers noted subsequent "investigations" and "trials" appeared to create a veneer of legality to the "prosecution" of individuals believed to be associated with Ukrainian military or security forces. Occupation authorities intimidated witnesses to influence their testimony.

On March 10, the "Luhansk People's Republic (LPR)" so-called court found guilty and sentenced Maksym Butkevych to 13 years in prison for attempted

murder and violating the customs of war in Severodonetsk, a city in Luhansk Oblast occupied by Russia in 2022. He allegedly fired a grenade launcher at two civilians during the battle for the city on June 4, 2022. Message logs between Butkevych and colleagues suggested he was not in Severodonetsk on that day. According to Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, as of November the only communication with the suspect since his capture in June 2022 was a single telephone call Butkevych made to his parents when he told them he was under investigation. Independent lawyers from Russia and Ukraine were unable to communicate with Butkevych or access the case files in the investigation against him. His whereabouts were unknown until December 5, when Russian Federal Penitentiary Service informed his lawyer, who had filed an official information request, that Butkevych was being held in a penal colony in occupied Luhansk Oblast.

Defendants in politically motivated cases in Crimea were increasingly transferred to the Russian Federation for trial. See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied Crimea.

Occupation authorities limited the ability to have a public hearing.

According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, occupation authorities banned family members and media from the courtroom for hearings related to charges of Hizb ut-Tahrir membership and other activities deemed

subversive under Russia's laws. The courts justified the closed hearings by citing vague concerns regarding the "safety of the participants." The courts failed to publish judgments in these cases.

Occupation authorities interfered with defendants' ability to access an attorney. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, defendants facing terrorism or extremism-related charges were often pressured into dismissing their privately hired lawyers in exchange for promised leniency. Human rights defenders reported occupation authorities retroactively applied Russia's laws to actions that took place before the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

According to ZMINA, as of August, 200 Ukrainian citizens were imprisoned in occupied Crimea or in Russia on political or religious charges, 99 of whom were Crimean Tatar Muslims charged with terrorism. According to the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporary Occupied Territories, as of late September there were 6,670 detained military personnel and more than 25,000 civilians detained in various places of detention by Russia's forces or its proxies.

Charges of extremism, terrorism, or violation of territorial integrity were particularly applied to religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Hizb ut-Tahrir or opponents of the occupation, such as Crimean Tatars,

independent journalists, and individuals expressing dissent on social media. Most of those detained in the occupied territories were either captured members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, those who demonstrated pro-Ukrainian opinions, those suspected of collaborating with the Security Service of Ukraine, civilians suspected of “subversive acts,” those who violated curfew hours, or those who had been held for ransom.

## **f. Transnational Repression**

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian actions.

## **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

Russia’s occupation forces evicted persons from their places of residence and seized their property without due process or restitution on a broad scale. In April, Ivan Fedorov, Mayor of occupied Melitopol, reported 674 private homes in Melitopol District had been seized, including more than 10 percent of housing stock in some communities, forcing residents to leave the oblast. Multiple reports indicated Russian military personnel and other persons arriving from Russia occupied the seized housing. In June, media reported occupation authorities seized property from residents in Crimea who did not hold Russian passports. On November 9, Kherson Oblast council deputy Serhiy Khlan reported occupation “police forces” were seizing and redistributing the property of businesspersons who had not re-

registered it with occupation authorities.

## **h. Unjust Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant laws of Russia and procedures that Russia's government applied and enforced in Russia-occupied areas. Occupation authorities and others engaged in electronic surveillance, entered residences and other premises without warrants, and harassed relatives and neighbors of perceived opposition figures.

Occupation authorities routinely conducted raids on homes to intimidate the local population, particularly Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, ostensibly on the grounds of searching for weapons, drugs, or "extremist literature." According to the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, occupation authorities conducted 53 raids between January and September, 36 of which were in the households of Crimean Tatars.

Human rights groups reported Russia's authorities exercised widespread authority to tap telephones and read electronic communications and had established a network of informants to report on suspicious activities.

Occupation authorities reportedly encouraged state employees to inform on their colleagues who might oppose the occupation. According to human

rights activists, eavesdropping and visits by security personnel created an environment in which persons were afraid to express any opinion contrary to the occupation authorities, even in private.

Occupation authorities regularly used recorded audio of discussions concerning religion and politics, obtained through illegal wiretapping of private homes and testimonies from unidentified witnesses, as evidence in court. For example, on May 31, the southern district military court sentenced Jebbar Bekirov to 17 years in a high-security prison, while Rustem Tairov, Rustem Murasov, and Zavur Abdullayev each received 12 years of imprisonment. They were arrested in 2021 and charged with terrorism for alleged participation in Hizb ut-Tahrir. The prosecution presented testimony of FSB officers and interrogation of anonymous witnesses, whose words could not be confirmed in the court, and recorded conversations of the defendants with other men.

In occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, Russia-led forces broke into private homes, raided the premises, and checked whether children were attending Ukrainian classes online. Russia-led forces looted, threatened men with forced mobilization, and terrorized and intimidated individuals in various ways.

## **i. Conflict-related Abuses**

After Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the levels of violence and scope of

abuses significantly increased throughout the country. Russia also armed, trained, and led proxy forces composed of mobilized inhabitants of territories under its occupation (including parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts and Crimea). Russia and Russia-led forces throughout the conflict denied access to international monitors, who did not have the access necessary to systematically record violations or abuses committed by Russia and Russia-led forces.

In its April report, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination highlighted Russia's policy of "incitement to racial hatred and propagation of racist stereotypes against ethnic Ukrainians, [and] alleged forced mobilization and conscription, which disproportionately affected ethnic minorities, including indigenous peoples."

The UN Commission of Inquiry documented patterns of willful killings, unlawful confinement, torture, rape, and unlawful transfers of detainees in the areas occupied by Russia's authorities in Ukraine. Violations were also committed against persons deported from Ukraine to the Russian Federation. According to the commission, many of the willful killings, unlawful confinement, rapes, and sexual violence were committed in the context of house-to-house searches, which were aimed at locating supporters of the Ukrainian armed forces or finding weapons. "Detention, interrogation, torture, or ill-treatment often preceded execution. Some victims were found with hands or feet tied. Based on medical records and

photographs, the most common method of killing was a gunshot to the head at close range,” according to the commission’s March report.

During the year, the HRMMU received credible allegations of conflict-related sexual violence against civilians in areas of Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson Oblasts occupied by the Russian Federation. The OHCHR was also investigating mounting allegations of conflict-related sexual violence against men, women, and girls. As of May 15, the HRMMU verified 23 such cases, mostly attributed to Russia-led armed forces. Documented cases included rape, gang rape, forced nudity and forced public stripping, sexual torture, and sexual abuse. The cases occurred in different regions of Ukraine and in a penitentiary facility in the Russian Federation.

Ukraine’s Office of the Prosecutor General reported 231 crimes of conflict-related sexual violence. As of September, law enforcement agencies were investigating crimes involving 149 women, 82 men, and 13 minor victims. The actual number of survivors was likely to be significantly higher due to the stigma of reporting such abuses. The age of the victims ranged from four to 82. Sexual violence affected victims of all ages. Family members, including children, were sometimes forced to witness the crimes.

**Killings:** As of September, the OHCHR recorded 27,449 total civilian casualties, with 9,701 of those killed and 17,748 injured following Russia’s full-scale invasion, including 4,621 from February 1 to July 31. Of the total of those killed, 10,611 were in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. The OHCHR

estimated the actual figures were considerably higher, but continued fighting constrained its documentation efforts. The OHCHR assessed most of these casualties were caused by missiles, explosive weapons or mines, and explosive remnants of war. Many attacks were indiscriminate or disproportionate with disregard for the presence of large concentrations of civilians or objects accorded special protection under international humanitarian law such as medical units and transport or dams, dikes, and nuclear power plants, which caused the civilian population excessive harm and suffering.

Russia's forces continued to use land mines without fencing, signs, or other measures to mitigate civilian casualties in areas under their control. Russia's forces reportedly mined roads, streets, fields, urban buildings such as hospitals and civic centers, as well as household objects, including toys and other items children would handle. According to survivors in liberated areas, mass media, and Ukrainian law enforcement, retreating forces of Russia left behind mined areas in disregard for civilian life. Ukrainian law enforcement officials maintained that, in some cases, the mining of territory complicated the discovery of mass burials that offered evidence of what they characterized as war crimes by Russia's forces.

Russia's forces attacked civilian targets across Ukraine throughout the year. From April 21 to April 28, Russian forces attacked civilian targets with drones, artillery, and missiles, killing at least 34 and injuring at least 117

civilians. On April 30, Russia launched several waves of attacks throughout the country with drones, artillery, and missiles. Shelling of Pavlohrad, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, hit an industrial plant, 25 private houses, six schools, and five shops, killing two and injuring 40, including five children. Zhytomyr Oblast reported a drone hit one industrial facility. Russia also shelled Sumy Oblast and Ochakiv, Mykolayiv Oblast.

The OHCHR documented and verified allegations of unlawful killings, including summary executions, of civilians in more than 30 settlements in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy Oblasts committed while these territories were under the control of Russian armed forces in late February and March 2022, as well as arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearance.

**Abductions:** Russia's forces and proxies carried out widespread abductions of public officials, local authorities, human rights defenders, journalists, and individuals suspected of supporting the Ukrainian government in areas controlled by Russia. The majority of victims were active or former local public officials, human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists, and media workers. Ukraine's national police registered more than 29,000 missing persons reports since Russia launched its full-scale invasion. From the beginning of the full-fledged invasion to July, ZMINA recorded at least 562 cases of abduction of civilians by Russia's forces and proxies in the temporarily occupied territories; 16 abductees were found dead, and 311 citizens were not released, or their fate was unknown, while 235 returned

home.

Russia's forces reportedly tortured and mistreated abductees to compel confessions or cooperation with occupation authorities. According to the OHCHR, Russia's forces and proxies used methods of torture or mistreatment such as punching and cutting detainees, putting sharp objects under fingernails, hitting with batons and rifle butts, strangling, waterboarding, electrocution, stress positions for long periods, exposure to cold temperatures or to a hot box, deprivation of water and food, and mock executions or threats.

On June 23, Russia's forces abducted Serhiy Potynh, an expert on labor safety at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and held him in a local police station where alleged dissidents were kept. Russia's forces regularly interrogated and tortured him, but no charges had been brought against him as of December.

In May, Russia's forces abducted journalist Iryna Levchenko and her husband Oleksandr in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Oblast. According to relatives, Russia's forces abducted the couple off the street and first took them to the office they used for their "law enforcement units." The whereabouts of the detainees were unknown as of December.

**Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture:** Russia's forces widely perpetrated rape and torture, as reported and documented by the OHCHR

and other human rights organizations.

Observers noted Russia's forces and Russia-supported forces systematically denied access to independent observers, complicating the documentation of abuses in areas occupied by Russia. The International Committee of the Red Cross had visited hundreds of prisoners of war on both sides of the conflict and continued to demand access to all prisoners of war and civilian internees.

The Ukrainian Ombudsperson's Office reported that Russia's Kursk Remand Prison No. 1 (SIZO -1), headed by Aleksandr Baglay, was particularly notorious for systematic torture of Ukrainian POWs. The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's office collected testimonies documenting conditions of detention for prisoners of war in Kursk SIZO-1. According to the testimony of former prisoners, the institution operated as a torture chamber for Ukrainian prisoners, where detainees were deprived of rights and routinely subjected to torture, beatings, and forms of humiliation.

In Russia-occupied territory, conditions in detention centers were harsh and life threatening (see section 1.c.). Sexual violence was more prevalent in "unofficial" detention facilities, where in some cases women and men were not separated. The OHCHR reported that "different types of sexual violence were used as a form of torture to seek to obtain information or a confession, to punish, or to intimidate men and women in detention settings." According to the OHCHR, Russian penitentiary staff used

“electrocution and beatings to genitals, forced nudity, beatings or tasering after the shower, or threats of sexual violence against the victims or their loved ones.”

Reported forms of abuse included rape, threats of rape, threats of castration, intentional damage to genitalia, threats of sexual violence against family members, sexual harassment, forced nudity, coercion to watch sexual violence against family members, sex trafficking, and humiliation.

**Other Conflict-related Abuse:** There were reports Russia’s forces forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of civilians from Russia-occupied areas to Russia. According to the OHCHR, civilians seeking to escape the conflict felt compelled to evacuate in any direction possible, even if they did not want to enter Russia. Ukrainian children trapped in war zones faced death, injuries, separation from their families, and deportation to Russia. According to the Children of War platform, since the start of Russia’s invasion, 504 children were killed and 1,129 injured as of October 2.

Numerous credible international organizations, NGOs, and Ukrainian government agencies reported on Russia’s systematic forcible transfer and deportation of Ukraine’s children. Their estimates on the number of children involved ranged widely. According to Ombudsperson Dmytro Lubinets, approximately 20,000 Ukrainian children were forcibly deported as of October. The Ukrainian Ministry of Reintegration documented 19,546

Ukrainian children deported to Russia as of October 2. According to human rights organizations from the Ukraine 5 AM Coalition, Russian authorities deported as many as 260,000 to 700,000 Ukrainian children; it was unclear how many of these children were relocated with their legal guardians as part of Russia's filtration efforts.

According to a report by Yale's Conflict Observatory, Russia's forces and their proxies forcibly transferred or deported more than 6,000 Ukrainian children, including children ranging from four months to 17 years of age, to Russia or within Russia-held territories, at times without or with coerced parental consent, where they were held in "summer camps." According to the Yale Conflict Observatory report, at least 78 percent of the camps identified were engaged in systematic re-education exposing children from Ukraine to Russian academic, cultural, patriotic, or military education. The report stated that, "[m]ultiple camps endorsed by the Russian Federation were advertised as 'integration programs,' with the apparent goal of integrating children from Ukraine into the Russian government's vision of national culture, history, and society." Some of the children with unclear guardianship, particularly those living in orphanages or state institutions, were later transferred to Russian foster families for adoption.

Russian authorities relocated some Ukrainian minors, including those residing in Ukraine's institutions prior to February 2022, for supposed medical care in occupied territories and the Russian Federation. According

to the report, “The camps and other facilities holding children from Ukraine were part of a system centrally coordinated by officials of Russia’s federal government.”

In late 2022, Russian occupation authorities also began threatening to remove children from parents who refused to send them to local schools, whose curriculum was dictated by the Russian Ministry of Education, according to Ivan Fedorov, mayor-in-exile of occupied Melitopol. Ukraine’s Children’s Rights Commissioner Daria Herasymchuk reported that Russian officials removed children from parents who refused to cooperate with occupation authorities.

The Eastern Ukrainian Human Rights Group (EHRG) reported that beginning in March, Russian occupation forces increasingly integrated a new method of removing Ukrainian children, with “courts” stripping parents of custody rights for an inability to financially support their children. The EHRG noted residents in occupied territory faced pervasive financial problems, as Russia blocked payments from Ukraine and Russian employers failed to pay local salaries; it also reported families whose children were taken away were not financially worse off than other families. The EHRG identified multiple cases in which “courts” removed children from the families of men forcibly mobilized into the Russian military, on the basis that these families could not provide for their children.

Russia did not allow sufficient access to international observers or

organizations to locate or return children; when children were located, their relatives had to undertake costly and dangerous trips to Russia and endure harassment and interrogation by security forces to retrieve their children. As of October, the Ombudsperson's Office reported only 387 deported children had returned from Russia.

In 2022, Russian President Putin signed a decree making it easier to adopt and obtain Russian citizenship for Ukrainian children without parental care, thus making it more difficult for surviving relatives to return these wrongfully adopted children to Ukraine. Russia also prepared a register of suitable Russian families for Ukrainian children and offered payment for each child who received citizenship, up to \$1,000 for those with disabilities.

Russia's forces routinely bombed hospitals, resulting in civilian deaths. On February 24, a Russia-launched ballistic missile struck near a hospital in Vuhledar in the Ukrainian-controlled part of Donetsk, killing four civilians and wounding 10; six health-care workers were injured in the attack.

Russia's forces occupied medical facilities, evicting civilian patients and turning them into military hospitals, depriving the civilian population of medical care.

Human rights monitors reported that Russia's forces continued to patrol towns and cities under their control, conduct identification checks, and look in residents' houses and on personal mobile phones for pro-Ukrainian photographs, symbols, or posts on social networks.

## Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

### a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

In occupied areas, Russia's forces suppressed freedom of expression, including for members of the press, through harassment, intimidation, abductions, and physical assaults on journalists and media outlets. They also prevented the transmission of Ukrainian and independent television and radio programming in areas under their occupation.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territories.

**Freedom of Expression:** The HRMMU noted occupation authorities placed “excessive limitations on the freedoms of opinion and expression.” In 2022, Russia's parliament passed a law imposing a prison term of up to 15 years for spreading intentionally “fake” news regarding Russia's military. Occupation authorities also applied a new administrative article outlawing “public actions aimed at discrediting the Russian army” to prosecute those expressing dissent with actions taken by Crimean occupation authorities.

In 2020, occupation authorities began enforcing a law that prohibited the unauthorized dissemination of information damaging to the FSB's

reputation without the organization's approval. Enforcement of this law in Crimea further deprived residents of the ability to exercise freedom of expression, by preventing them from publicly criticizing and disseminating information concerning reportedly unlawful actions of FSB officers and alleged violations or abuses of human rights.

Individuals could not publicly criticize Russia's occupation without fear of reprisal. Human rights groups reported the FSB engaged in widespread surveillance of social media, telephones, and electronic communication and routinely summoned individuals for "discussions" for speaking or posting opposition to the occupation. These unlawfully obtained recordings were often used against those who were unjustly detained in closed trials.

Occupation authorities often deemed expressions of dissent "extremism" and prosecuted individuals for them. On July 6, representatives of the "Center for Countering Extremism" in Crimea cited Abdureshit Dzhepparov for a post on a social media network that allegedly "discredited the armed forces of the Russian Federation." The Simferopol District "court" fined him 45,000 rubles (\$470).

On February 16, Russia's occupying authorities searched the house of Halyna Balaban, a former activist of the Ukrainian Culture Center, allegedly for a post on a social network in 2018. Occupation authorities issued a citation and moved Balaban to the district "court" of Simferopol, which fined her 2,000 Russian rubles (\$20) and confiscated her mobile phone.

Occupation authorities continued to ban the display of Ukrainian or Crimean Tatar symbols as “extremist.” Human rights groups claimed violations of this law were rare during the year because fewer residents displayed such symbols than in previous years, reportedly to avoid prosecution.

Occupation authorities deemed expressions of support for Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea to be equivalent to undermining Russia’s territorial integrity. There were multiple reports that occupation authorities detained and prosecuted individuals seeking to film raids on homes or court proceedings.

**Violence and Harassment:** The Institute of Mass Information (IMI) reported that Russia’s forces committed 536 crimes against journalists and media in Ukraine from the beginning of the full-scale invasion through September 24. As of October 24, Russia’s military killed 66 journalists in Ukraine, 10 of whom were killed while performing their professional duties. Another 24 journalists were injured.

There were numerous cases of Russia’s security forces harassing activists and detaining journalists in connection with their civic or professional activities. On July 27, Russia’s occupation authorities detained citizen journalists Luftiye Zudiyeva and Kulamet Ibrayimov near the building of the Simferopol supreme court, where they were reporting on the trial of detained Crimean Tatars. The journalists were not allowed to enter the court building and were later detained with 12 men who came to support

their relatives. Russia's authorities fined Zudiyeva 12,000 Russian rubles (\$125) and arrested Ibrayimov for five days.

Russia's missile attack on Kherson on April 26 killed the Ukrainian producer of Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, Bohdan Bitik, and injured the newspaper's correspondent, Corrado Zunino.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, journalists resorted to self-censorship to continue reporting and broadcasting. In partially occupied oblasts, Russian television and internet monopolized the communication space.

There were reports occupation authorities sought to restrict access to or remove internet content concerning Crimea they disliked. As of August, occupation authorities had blocked 1,600 internet resources as "those containing extremist information" in Crimea, including the websites of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Ministry of Integration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, leading human rights NGOs, and major independent Ukrainian news outlets, among others. On May 6, Russia's authorities declared the activities of the Crimean Human Rights Group "undesirable" and determined that it "posed a threat to the Constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation." Censorship of independent internet sites was widespread.

Occupation authorities banned most Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar-language broadcasts, replacing the content with programming from Russia.

According to the IMI, Russia's occupying authorities shut down all pro-Ukrainian media in occupied territories and founded their own newspapers and television channels.

According to the Opora NGO, Russian authorities blocked 979 online resources in Russia and occupied territories, including Ukrainian language media, official websites of the Ukrainian authorities, and web resources of public Ukrainian organizations, human rights groups, and volunteer initiatives.

The IMI reported the media landscape of Zaporizhzhia Oblast changed radically beginning with Russia's full-scale invasion. Since Russia's forces controlled most of the oblast's key cities, many media outlets were forced to close. According to the IMI, there were no newspapers left in Melitopol, Berdyansk, Polohy, Tokmak, and Enerhodar (all in Zaporizhzhia Oblast). Many online media stopped operating. Pro-Ukrainian television channels in occupied areas also stopped broadcasting. Instead, Russia's propaganda television channels broadcast in occupied areas.

**National Security:** Occupation authorities cited laws protecting national security to justify retaliation against opponents of Russia's occupation.

The Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service included prominent critics

of the occupation on its list of extremists and terrorists. Inclusion on the list prevented individuals from holding bank accounts, using notary services, and conducting other financial transactions.

Occupation authorities frequently cited “extremism,” “terrorism,” or other purported national security grounds to justify harassment or prosecution of individuals in retaliation for expressing opposition to the occupation. For example, on June 6, a military court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Crimean artist Bohdan Ziza to 15 years in a penal colony. Law enforcement officers detained him in 2022 after he splashed the entrance of a building in Yevpatoriya (a structure that previously housed the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people) with yellow and blue paint. Authorities first charged him with intentional destruction or damage of property but later added vandalism and terrorism. Russia’s occupation authorities included him in a “list of terrorists and extremists.” According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, investigators used illegal methods of investigation, namely pressure, intimidation, threats, and obstruction of the defense lawyer’s work.

## **Internet Freedom**

Russia’s occupation forces reportedly restricted or disrupted access to Ukrainian mobile operators and internet in almost all the occupied areas.

Residents were blocked from accessing widely used social media platforms and messaging applications, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Viber.

Human rights groups and journalists who were critical of Russia’s aggressive

actions reported their websites were subjected to malicious cyber activities, such as coordinated denial of service incidents and unauthorized attempts to obtain information from computers as well as coordinated campaigns of trolling and harassment on social media. Russia's occupation authorities restricted free expression on the internet (see section 2.a. of the *Country Reports on Human Rights for Russia*) by imposing repressive Russian Federation laws on occupied territories. Security services routinely monitored and controlled internet activity to suppress dissenting opinions. According to media accounts, occupation authorities interrogated and harassed residents of Russia-occupied territories for online postings, including those that demonstrated pro-Ukrainian views, opposition to Russia's occupation and the actions of occupation authorities, and support for groups occupation authorities deemed "extremist."

## **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

In Russia-occupied territory, occupation authorities commonly prevented individuals from openly participating in peaceful assemblies, especially those protesting the occupation.

Russia-led forces in the occupied areas continued to implement "laws" requiring all religious organizations except the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to undergo "state religious expert evaluations" and reregister with them.

According to the HRMMU, most religious groups recognized under Ukrainian law were unable to reregister because of stringent legal requirements under “laws” in the occupied territories that mirrored Russia’s legislation preventing or discouraging reregistration of many religious communities. On December 7, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church reported a December 2022 “order” issued by occupied Zaporizhzhia “governor” Yevhen Balitskyy, which banned the operation of the church, alleging it had stored “explosives and firearms on the territory of religious buildings and auxiliary premises” and citing “the participation of parishioners in mass riots and anti-Russian rallies in March-April 2022,” “distribution of literature inciting violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation,” and “active participation” of church members in the “activities of extremist organizations and propaganda of neo-Nazi ideas.”

According to the April report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the “very restrictive attitude of Russian occupying authorities in Crimea towards policing Crimean Tatar assemblies veered towards even tighter control. Sanctions such as short-term arrests and fines were meted out against Crimean Tatars, often on the spot and without any prior warning.” The exercise of Crimean Tatars’ freedom of peaceful assembly was reportedly negatively impacted by an atmosphere of surveillance and harassment.

In particular, freedom of peaceful assembly was undermined by the blanket

requirement of prior authorization by the occupation authorities for any assembly.

Human rights monitors reported that occupation authorities routinely denied permission to hold assemblies based on political beliefs, notably to opponents of the occupation or those seeking to protest the actions of the occupation authorities. Those who gathered without permission were regularly charged with administrative offenses. Expansive rules regarding types of gatherings that required permits and selective enforcement of the rules made it difficult for protesters to avoid such offenses. On August 25, Russian security forces detained 23 Crimean Tatars, including civil society activists, journalists, and elderly persons, for gathering in front of a court building in Simferopol to express solidarity with friends and relatives on trial.

Occupation authorities brought charges for “unauthorized assemblies” against single-person protests, even though preauthorization was not required for individual protests.

There were reports authorities used a ban on “unauthorized missionary activity” to restrict public gatherings of members of religious minority groups.

On June 25, Russian occupation authorities detained two men for allegedly conducting an unauthorized rally in Bilohirsk and having Crimean Tatar flags mounted on their vehicles. The district “court” found Rustem Kurnosov and

Enver Useinov guilty of committing an administrative offense and imposed fines of 20,000 Russian rubles (\$200) for “organizing or holding an unauthorized public event.”

There were reports occupation authorities charged and fined individuals for allegedly violating public assembly rules in retaliation against those who gathered to witness security force raids on homes.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied Crimea.

### **Freedom of Association**

According to the HRMMU, Russia’s and Russia-led forces did not permit domestic and international civil society organizations, including human rights defenders, to operate freely in occupied areas. Residents informed the HRMMU they were being prosecuted (or feared being prosecuted) by the “ministry of state security” for their pro-Ukrainian views or previous affiliation with Ukrainian NGOs. If human rights groups attempted to work in those areas, they faced significant harassment and intimidation. The HRMMU also noted some Russia-led civil society organizations appeared to require certain persons, such as public-sector employees, to join.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied

and enforced in occupied Crimea. See also section 7.a.

Occupation authorities broadly restricted the exercise of freedom of association for individuals who opposed the occupation. For example, there were numerous reports of authorities taking steps to harass, intimidate, arrest, and imprison members of Crimean Solidarity, an unregistered movement of friends and family of victims of repression by occupation authorities that opposed Russia's occupation of Crimea. The Crimean Human Rights Group documented multiple cases in which police visited the homes of Crimean Solidarity activists to threaten them or warn them not to engage in "extremist" activities. In March, occupation authorities distributed letters warning against participating in "unauthorized mass" gatherings, as they might constitute "extremist" activities. At least seven Crimean Tatar activists and journalists received such "preventive warnings."

According to human rights groups, Russia's security services routinely monitored prayers at mosques for any mention that Crimea remained part of Ukraine. Russia's security forces also monitored mosques for anti-Russia sentiment and as a means of recruiting police informants, whose secret testimony was used in trials of alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members.

All congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses were banned as an "extremist organization." On February 27, the Yalta city "court" found Jehovah's Witnesses Taras Kuzyo, Serhiy Lyulin, Petro Zhylytsov, and Darya Kuzyo guilty of financing and participating in an "extremist organization." The "court"

sentenced Taras Kuzyo to six and one-half years in prison, Serhiy Lyulin and Petro Zhylytsov to six years and one month in prison, and issued Darya Kuzyo a three-year suspended sentence. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people remained banned for purported “extremism” despite a decision by the International Court of Justice holding that occupation authorities had to “refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis.” Following the 2016 ban on the Crimean Tatar Mejlis as an “extremist organization,” occupation authorities banned gatherings by Mejlis members and prosecuted individuals for discussing the Mejlis on social media.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **d. Freedom of Movement**

Occupation authorities restricted freedom of movement.

**In-country Movement:** Occupation authorities maintained a state “border” at the administrative boundary between mainland Ukraine and occupied Crimea and the other four purportedly annexed territories. According to the HRMMU, the administrative boundary and the absence of public

transportation between Crimea and occupied mainland Ukraine continued to undermine freedom of movement to and from the peninsula, affecting mainly the elderly and individuals with limited mobility. Children younger than 16 were allowed to cross the administrative boundary between occupied mainland Ukraine and Crimea both ways if accompanied by one parent. Children ages 14-16 could cross the administrative line both ways unaccompanied if they studied at an educational institution located in mainland Ukraine and resided or were registered in Crimea.

There were reports occupation authorities selectively detained and at times abused persons attempting to enter or leave Crimea. According to human rights groups, occupation authorities routinely detained adult men at the administrative boundary for additional questioning, threatened to seize their passports and documents, seized their telephones and memory cards, and questioned them for hours. There were reports that Crimean Tatars were targeted for conscription. The HRMMU documented “many cases of men and women who were arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared by the Russian occupation authorities while trying to cross the administrative boundary line between mainland Ukraine and Crimea.”

Traveling from the occupied areas into Ukrainian-controlled territory was cumbersome and dangerous. As of January, the sole entry point to cross directly from the occupied areas into Ukraine was closed. Civilians wishing to travel from the occupied parts of Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and

Luhansk Oblasts to the territory of Ukraine under government control could do so only through the Russian Federation. The trip was very expensive and dangerous since it involved going through a “filtration” process, a system of security checks and personal data collection, during which many individuals were arbitrarily detained.

UNHCR reported that between January and June, nearly 100 incidents of restricted movement on humanitarian operations were documented in occupied areas, hindering assistance delivery. At least five humanitarian workers were killed in the line of duty in Ukraine in the first six months of the year. Denials of access, including to the left bank after the June Kakhovka Dam disaster, severely hampered the provision of humanitarian aid to Russian-occupied areas.

**Citizenship:** Russia’s occupation authorities required all residents of occupied areas to accept Russian passports and offered them incentives to move to Russia. On April 27, Russian President Putin signed a decree stating that persons residing in the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk Oblasts would retroactively be considered “foreigners or stateless persons” as of September 30 and could be subject to deportation unless they obtained Russian citizenship.

In 2022, Russian President Putin signed a decree fast-tracking Russian citizenship to all citizens of Ukraine, not just those in purportedly annexed territories. Residents of Crimea who chose not to accept Russian passports

were considered foreigners, but in some cases could obtain a residency permit. Persons without Russian passports holding a residency permit were deprived of key rights and could not own agricultural land, vote or run for office, register a religious congregation, or register a vehicle. Occupation authorities denied those who refused Russian passports access to “government” employment, education, and health care as well as the ability to open bank accounts and buy insurance, among other limitations.

According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, Russian authorities prosecuted private employers who continued to employ Ukrainians. Fines could be imposed on employers for every recorded case of employing a Ukrainian citizen without a labor license. Fines in such cases amounted to several million dollars.

In some cases, authorities compelled Crimean residents to surrender their Ukrainian passports, complicating international travel, because many countries did not recognize “passports” issued by Russian occupation authorities.

### **e. Protection of Refugees**

Not applicable.

### **f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

## (IDPs)

Approximately 60,000 residents of Crimea were registered as IDPs by the Ukrainian government on the mainland, according to the Ministry of Social Policy. The Mejlis and local NGOs, such as Crimea SOS, believed the actual number could be as high as 100,000, as most IDPs were unregistered.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections:** The Russian Federation organized sham elections from August 31 to September 10 in occupied portions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. The OHCHR reported receiving consistent allegations that Russia’s forces and their proxies exerted force to compel participation in the process. In a September report, the HMMR noted that any attempt to hold “elections” with the backing of forces that held illegitimate control in these occupied territories undermined international humanitarian law and international human rights law, rendering the results legally invalid. Before holding “elections,” the occupying authorities engaged in propaganda and reportedly bribed voters through “humanitarian aid” from the local and federal budgets.

Candidates were selected through an opaque process reportedly orchestrated by political curators dispatched from Russia and ranged from former Ukrainian politicians (including members of the pro-Russian Party of Regions, which Ukraine banned on February 21), to taxi drivers, security guards, and bodyguards. All candidates had to undergo a polygraph test administered by the FSB to prove they were loyal to Russia. According to Eastern Human Rights Group, local councils were stripped of any real power and local political parties were banned; only branches of Russian political parties could take part in elections. Russian authorities reported high turnout in the occupied territories, where hundreds of thousands of individuals supposedly voted in the “elections.” No independent observers verified any of the activities associated with the “elections.”

There were numerous reports that the occupying authorities set up “mobile voting points,” including ballot boxes in city squares, village centers, cars, and other irregular locations. In Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, observers reported local collaborators and Russian soldiers walked door to door carrying assault rifles and ballot boxes, making individuals vote.

Russia’s occupation authorities had prevented Crimean residents from voting in Ukrainian national and local elections since Crimea’s occupation began in 2014. Russia’s occupation authorities permitted Crimean residents to vote in the September 2021 Russia State Duma elections. Occupation authorities claimed a voter turnout rate of 49.75 percent. Independent

observers and elections experts alleged massive electoral fraud, including coerced voting by state employees and ballot stuffing, among other irregularities.

## **Section 4. Corruption in Government**

**Corruption:** There were some reports of systemic corruption among Russia’s appointed proxy “office holders” in occupied areas, including through embezzlement of Russian state funds allocated to support the occupation. On January 30, the Feodosiya “court” placed former mayor Andrey Lebedev under arrest for two months under suspicion of abuse of power. Other “officials” were reportedly being investigated by Russian security forces for the illegal land transfers, which they said they had undertaken on the verbal instruction of Mikhail Nazarov, appointed deputy chairperson of the Russian “government” of Crimea. The investigation continued at the end of the year.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

Russia-led forces and proxies in Russia-occupied areas routinely denied access to domestic and international civil society organizations. Human rights groups attempting to work in those areas faced significant harassment

and intimidation (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association). Most independent human rights organizations ceased activities in Crimea following Russia's occupation in 2014. Occupation authorities refused to cooperate with independent human rights NGOs, ignored their views, and harassed human rights monitors and threatened them with fines and imprisonment.

Russia continued to deny access to the Crimean Peninsula to international human rights monitors from the OSCE and the United Nations. There were no independent NGOs working in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

**Retribution against Human Rights Defenders:** The NGO ZMINA reported the Russian army and FSB consistently persecuted human rights defenders and journalists, including by fabricating charges of terrorism, extremism, espionage, sabotage, or subversion against them. ZMINA provided assistance to 10 human rights activists who had been held in captivity for periods ranging from 11 to 18 months. Many of the human rights activists and journalists reported being tortured while in detention.

**The United Nations or Other International Bodies:** Russia denied UN representatives, international human rights monitors from the OSCE, and ICRC representatives access to occupied territory.

## Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

### Women

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The Eastern Ukrainian Human Rights Group reported an 84 percent increase in rapes reported in Russia-occupied Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts compared to levels prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, with 219 cases registered in occupied areas. Journalists accessing online data from Russian military courts found that in 2022, Sevastopol, and Crimea writ large, led in the number of rape cases involving Russian military men. According to local activists and lawyers, the military often acted to silence cases through threats or bribery. Furthermore, they assessed that many women did not report rapes. In its March 15 report, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine documented cases of sexual and gender-based violence committed by Russian authorities in nine provinces of Ukraine. Domestic violence remained a serious problem in occupied Crimea; however, occupation authorities' restrictions on human rights organizations made it difficult to assess its prevalence. There was no information available on rape or domestic violence in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

**Discrimination:** This information was not available due to the restriction of independent NGOs working in the Russia-occupied areas.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or

involuntary sterilization on the part of occupation authorities.

Women in Crimea accessed reproductive health care through services funded by the Russian occupation authorities, private insurance, and NGO programs. No Ukrainian or international monitors had access to Crimea or other occupied Russian areas, making it difficult to assess the state of reproductive health care there, including whether, and what kind of services were provided by occupation authorities for survivors of sexual violence. Residents reported they were told they would be denied medical care if they did not obtain Russian passports. One woman reported she was told she would have to give birth “at home or on the street,” but would not have access to a hospital unless she applied for a passport.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

Since the beginning of the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, Russian authorities singled out Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians for discrimination, abuse, deprivation of civil liberties and religious and economic rights, and violence, including killings and abductions. The August 2021 UN secretary-general’s report noted, “[t]he activities of the Mejlis remained prohibited in Crimea.”

There were reports Russian occupation authorities openly advocated for discrimination against Crimean Tatars. Occupation authorities harassed Crimean Tatars for speaking their language in public and forbade speaking it

in the workplace, and teachers reportedly prohibited it in schools. Crimean Tatars were prohibited from celebrating their national holidays and commemorating victims of previous abuses.

Occupation authorities prohibited the use of Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian flags and symbols. In early September, occupying authorities banned the flying of Crimean Tatar flags during the celebration of the start of the new academic year.

Russian occupation authorities prohibited Crimean Tatars affiliated with the Mejlis from registering businesses or properties as a matter of policy.

Ethnic Ukrainians also faced discrimination by occupation authorities. Ukrainian as a language of instruction was removed from educational institutions in occupied areas. In 2017, the International Court of Justice ruled on provisional measures in proceedings brought by Ukraine against the Russian Federation, concluding unanimously that the Russian Federation had to “ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language.”

Occupation authorities did not permit churches linked to ethnic Ukrainians, in particular the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, to register under Russian law. Occupation authorities harassed and intimidated members of these churches and used court proceedings to force the OCU to leave properties it had rented for years.

The largest OCU congregation in Crimea closed in 2019 following a ruling by

occupation authorities that its cathedral located in Simferopol had to be “returned to the state.” The church was shut down after repeated refusals by authorities to allow it to register.

## Children

**Birth Registration:** Under both Ukrainian law and laws imposed by Russian occupation authorities, either birthplace or parentage determined citizenship. Russia’s occupation complicated the question of citizenship for children born in occupied territory as it made it more difficult for parents to register a child as a citizen with Ukrainian authorities. Registration in the country required a hospital certificate, which was retained when a birth certificate was issued. In occupied areas, new parents could obtain only a Russian birth certificate and did not have access to a hospital certificate. The Ukrainian government instituted a process whereby births in Russia-occupied areas could be recognized with documents issued by occupation authorities.

**Education:** Occupation authorities imposed Russian as the instructional language in educational institutions of all levels. They forced Ukrainian citizens to enroll their children in schools and preschool facilities that followed the Russian curriculum. Children were taught by teachers and educators from the Russian Federation. If parents did not agree, the occupation administration threatened to remove children from families and

place them in boarding schools, where they could be wrongfully adopted by Russian citizens. The occupation administration imposed a curriculum that included a “patriotic education program” and initial military training for schoolchildren.

**Child Abuse:** Russia had no law on child abuse, and occupation authorities’ restrictions on human rights organizations made it difficult to assess its prevalence.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

According to a June statement by Vladimir Terentyev of the “Main Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol,” there were approximately 600 crimes against children investigated in 2022, resulting in 295 cases sent to court. Terentyev noted that 23 of the children died, four of them from “criminal attacks.” In the case of one of the deaths deemed to have been caused by negligence, a woman was sentenced to 1.5 years in prison for failing to obtain proper medical care (her baby died during a home birth), and her doula was under investigation.

There were cases of prosecutions of adults for child rape. In one case, a resident of Razdolnensky District, Crimea, was sentenced in October to 16

years for raping his stepdaughter, age 11, repeatedly over the course of six months. He threatened to kill her if she appealed to law enforcement.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** In one case involving child pornography, a man was sentenced in December under several charges, per the “prosecutor’s office” in Crimea (the precise charges were not detailed). He received seven years in prison followed by 1.5 years of restricted freedom. The man had sent pornographic materials to more than 10 children via the internet and messenger services and demanded intimate photographs from them in return.

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

## **Antisemitism**

According to Jewish groups, the Jewish population in Crimea was approximately 10,000 to 15,000, with most living in Simferopol. According to the Jewish association, there were approximately 30,000 Jewish persons living in the Donbas. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents;

however, Russia's occupation authorities' restrictions on human rights groups limited their ability to properly monitor antisemitic acts.

## Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report at

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

**Criminalization:** See the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory.

**Violence and Harassment:** The UN Human Rights Council's independent expert received reports of increased violence and discrimination against members of the LGBTQI+ community in Crimea as well as the use of homophobic propaganda employed by the occupation authorities. LGBTQI+ persons reportedly were frequently subjected to beatings in public spaces and entrapped by organized groups through social networks. The council's report noted, "[t]his environment created an atmosphere of fear and terror for members of the community, with related adverse impacts on their mental health and well-being." According to the NGO Nash Svit, in April, a

Russian military patrol assaulted a gay man in Donetsk. The military did not like his appearance and voice, beat the man, and took his smart phone.

**Discrimination:** Russia's forces and Russia-led forces in occupied areas systematically failed to respect the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

Human rights groups and LGBTQI+ activists reported that most LGBTQI+ individuals fled Crimea and Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts after Russia's occupation began. Those who remained lived in fear of abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

There was insufficient access to information on the treatment of members of the LGBTQI+ community in occupied eastern Ukraine.

According to the HRMMU, NGOs working on access to health care among vulnerable groups found it impossible to advocate for LGBTQI+ persons due to fear of retaliation by occupation authorities.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** There was insufficient access to information on the availability of legal gender recognition within Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** There was insufficient access to information on coercive medical or psychological practices within Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:**

In 2022, President Putin signed legislation that widely banned public expression of LGBTQI+ identity in Russia. The law made it illegal to spread “propaganda” regarding “nontraditional sexual relations” in the media, advertising, film, or on social media. Demonstrations of “nontraditional relationships or preferences” were also barred from advertising, and from any outlet visible to children. Distributing to children any information “that causes children to want to change their sex” was also prohibited. As Russia deemed occupied areas of Ukraine to be part of its sovereign territory, the law was likely to be enforced in Crimea, and Russia-occupied parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

Occupation authorities prohibited any LGBTQI+ group from holding public events in Crimea, and, although there were no reports available, occupation authorities may have enforced similar policies in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

See section 6 of the *Country Reports on Human Rights* for Russia.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities in Russia-occupied Crimea and occupied areas in eastern Ukraine faced a lack of appropriate care and education. The UN Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) reported that persons with disabilities trapped in Russia-occupied areas in Ukraine were used as “human shields” by Russia’s armed forces. The UNCRPD was also

gravely concerned that persons with disabilities were reportedly trapped in the conflict zones and that the evacuation of the institutions in conflict areas was not prioritized.

According to reporting, the UNCRPD also urged Ukraine and the Russian Federation to immediately evacuate persons with disabilities who remained in residential institutions on territory under their respective control, and to ensure the evacuation process was monitored by independent parties. The United Nations reported the UNCRPD was further concerned regarding reports that persons with disabilities who remained in residential institutions were at severe risk, as their access to basic resources, such as food, an adequate standard of living, and heating in the winter months, were jeopardized.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

Occupation authorities in Crimea applied the labor laws of the Russian Federation. It was expected that Russia's labor laws would be applied in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts after their purported annexation (see the *Country Report on Human Rights Practices* for Russia).

Occupation authorities imposed the labor laws and regulations of the

Russian Federation on Crimean workers, limited worker rights, and created barriers to the exercise of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the ability to strike. Trade unions were formally protected under Russia's laws but limited in practice. Employers were often able to engage in antiunion discrimination and violate collective bargaining rights. Occupation authorities threatened to nationalize property owned by Ukrainian labor unions in Crimea. Ukrainians who did not accept Russian passports faced job discrimination in all sectors of the economy. Only holders of Russian national identification cards were allowed to work in "government" and municipal positions. Labor activists believed unions were threatened in Crimea to accept "government" policy without question and faced considerable restrictions on advocating for their members.

The International Labor Organization received reports that those who remained working in the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant were forced to sign employment contracts with the Russian state atomic energy corporation, Rosatom, while still working under Ukrainian license, and to join unions created or controlled by the occupying forces, while the Ukrainian national operator, Energoatom, urged them not to do so.

According to the Nuclear Power and Industry Workers Union of Ukraine, some workers were forced to go to work and escorted to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant at gunpoint. Energoatom reported two workers were beaten to death and that 10 workers abducted by the occupying forces were

missing. In February, Vostok SOS monitors recorded four cases of forced labor of civilians in the occupied territories. All of them took place in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast. In Dniprorudne, Zaporizhzhia Oblast Russia's forces created a system of forced labor for those without a permanent residence.

Multiple sources reported cases of civilians forced to work on the front lines for the Russian military. In July, the Associated Press reported hundreds of civilians were forced to dig trenches and other fortifications on the front lines in Zaporizhzhia, as well as cases of civilians being forced to dig graves in occupied territory.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at:

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

Child labor in amber and coal mining remained a problem in Crimea. No information was available at year's end regarding labor practices in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

#### **d. Discrimination (see section 6)**

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

See the *Country Reports on Human Rights for Russia* for a description of the relevant Russian laws and procedures that the Russian government applied and enforced in occupied territory. Due to a lack of available information, it was not possible to determine the degree to which the government effectively enforced these laws. Anecdotal evidence suggested enforcement was poor.