

Information Documents

SG/Inf(2026)23

2 September 2026

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.....	5
II	RELEVANT OBLIGATIONS STEMMING FROM THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS	6
III	BACKGROUND	8
IV	HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ARMED CONFLICT.....	9
	Right to life.....	9
	Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.....	11
	Right to liberty and security	13
	Right to a fair trial.....	15
V	HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF OCCUPATION.....	16
	Consequences of forcible extension of Russian citizenship and documentation issues	16
	The situation of Ukrainians, indigenous people and persons belonging to national minorities.....	18
	Cultural heritage	19
	Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion	20
	Access to education, including mother tongue-based education	21
	Freedom of expression	23
	Freedom of movement	24
	Right to property	25
	Conscription	26
	Gender aspects	27
VI	FORCIBLY TRANSFERRED AND UNLAWFULLY DEPORTED CHILDREN	28
VII	ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE.....	30
VIII	CONCLUDING REMARKS	31

I INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1. The present report is issued pursuant to the Ministers' Deputies' decision¹ CM/Del/Dec(2025)1534/2.4 adopted at their 1534th meeting, on 9 July 2025, inviting the Secretary General to report on a regular basis, at least once a year, on the human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, using all available sources of information, so as to further provide the Committee of Ministers with a basis for an assessment of the situation and possible decisions on action.

2. A delegation of the Council of Europe Secretariat conducted a working visit to Warsaw, Poland, and Kyiv, Ukraine, during 24-27 March 2026. The report draws on meetings and discussions with the Ukrainian authorities, international organisations, human rights defenders and civil society activists, information obtained by relevant Council of Europe bodies, as well as information available in the public domain. The Secretary General visited Ukraine on 16-17 February 2026. He wishes to express his gratitude to the Ukrainian authorities for their support in organising the visits and to all interlocutors for their assistance and valuable contributions.

3. Because of the Russian Federation's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and cessation of its Council of Europe membership, meaningful discussions with the Russian government on the relevant issues at stake, including access, could not be pursued. The Council of Europe mechanisms lack unhindered physical access to the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

4. The present report focuses primarily on human rights issues from a European Convention on Human Rights (hereinafter the Convention) standpoint, as outlined in relevant Committee of Ministers' decisions. The timeframe under review covers a one-year period from April 2025 to March 2026. To this end, the report informs about several well-documented patterns and representative cases of human rights violations in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation (*rationae territoriae*).² While those have been reflected to the extent possible, the report does not purport to provide an exhaustive account of the human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation.

5. The report does not replace the monitoring procedures established in the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the report should not be seen as prejudging any possible decisions in the cases pending before the European Court of Human Rights which remains competent to deal with alleged violations of the Convention that occurred before 16 September 2022.

¹ See also previous decisions CM/Del/Dec(2023)1477/2.4 adopted at the 1477th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, on 4 October 2023 and CM/Del/Dec(2024)1500/2.5, adopted at the 1500th meeting on 5 and 10 June 2024.

² The exact delineation of territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation is based on the list of the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine. The list is periodically amended to reflect the situation on the ground.

6. The European Court of Human Rights has recognised the application of the Convention both during peacetime and in situations of international armed conflict and occupation.³ The report relies notably on the principle of “effective control over the territory” as well as on the interplay between international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) in times of international armed conflict as interpreted in the judgments of the Court.⁴

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

II RELEVANT OBLIGATIONS STEMMING FROM THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

8. It is recalled that whereas the Russian Federation ceased to be a High Contracting Party to the Convention on 16 September 2022, the latter remains applicable before this date. The European Court of Human Rights continues to process a significant caseload of war-related violations. In 2025, the Registry completed the registration of a large number of individual applications submitted to the Court which remains the only international court adjudicating violations of human rights arising from the war. While Russia’s obligation to co-operate with the Court and implement its judgments in accordance with the specified terms forms part of its adherence to the international law, to date the Russian Government has refused to co-operate.

9. On 9 July 2025, the Grand Chamber of the Court delivered the inter-State judgment in *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia* (application nos. 8019/16, 43800/14, 28525/20 and 11055/22). In addition to finding Russia responsible for serious and systemic human rights violations that occurred in the context of the conflict in Ukraine since 2014, including the downing of flight MH17, and following the full-scale military invasion from 2022, the Court indicated that the Russian authorities must take without delay several measures under Article 46.

³ Under the Geneva Conventions system, the situation in Ukraine is an international armed conflict. See Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, “Report to the United Nations General Assembly” (A/78/540), 19 October 2023. The Commission has also found reasonable grounds to conclude that the invasion and attacks by the armed forces of the Russian Federation against the territory and armed forces of Ukraine qualify as acts of aggression against Ukraine. See Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, “Report to the Human Rights Council” (A/HRC/52/62), 15 March 2023. According to the European Court of Human Rights the entry of Russian armed forces into Ukrainian territory from 24 February 2022 in the circumstances outlined in its judgment *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia* (application nos. 8019/16, 43800/14, 28525/20 and 11055/22) had amounted to an invasion. Furthermore, to the extent that Ukrainian territory was found to be under the Russian Federation’s effective control for the purposes of that State’s jurisdiction under Article 1, the Court considered it appropriate to refer to such territory as occupied territory.

⁴ The Court has established that specific IHL provisions do not displace Convention human rights guarantees but can be used as an interpretative tool when determining the scope of those guarantees; the Convention safeguards continue to apply.

Notably, this includes the release or safe return of all persons who were unlawfully deprived of liberty under Russian occupation before 16 September 2022 and who are still in the custody of the Russian authorities; and co-operation in the establishment of an international and independent mechanism to secure, as soon as possible and with due consideration of the children's best interests, the identification of all children transferred from Ukraine to Russia and temporarily occupied territories before 16 September 2022, the restoration of contact between these children and their surviving family members or legal guardians and the children's safe reunification with them.

10. It is also recalled that in its previous judgment in the inter-state case *Ukraine v. Russia* (re. Crimea) (application nos. 20958/14 and 38334/18) of 25 June 2024, the Grand Chamber held *inter alia* that Russia must take every measure to secure, as soon as possible, the safe return of the relevant prisoners who were transferred unlawfully from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol to penal facilities located on the territory of the Russian Federation.

11. The execution of both judgements remains under the supervision of the Committee of Ministers and subject to its decisions. The CM has set out a number of measures and obligations incumbent on the Russian Federation.⁵ It has also invited the authorities of member states to explore all possible means to ensure execution, with a view to ensuring accountability for the serious breaches of international law established in it.

12. As of February 2026, there were over 5827 individual applications concerning the different situations falling within the scope of the above-mentioned inter-state cases – around 1700 have already been communicated. The interim measures indicated by the Court in individual applications concerning the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine since February 2022 are still pending in 27 cases. These applications mainly concern Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) held in Russian captivity. In 2025, the Court lifted the interim measures in 30 applications following the information provided to the Court which showed that the POWs had either been released from captivity, or their bodies had been returned to Ukraine.

13. The Secretary General has continued to strongly urge the Russian authorities to comply with their unconditional obligation to abide by all judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in respect of the Russian Federation and to take all required measures to execute them.⁶

⁵ See CM/Del/Dec(2025)1521/H46-29 of 6 March 2025 and CM/Del/Dec(2025) 1545/H46-34 of 4 December 2025.

⁶ Letter from the Secretary General to Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2025.

14. Despite not exercising effective control over temporarily occupied territories, Ukraine retains positive obligations under the Convention. These obligations are limited in scope and concern, in particular, the measures that the State may reasonably be expected to take in order to re-establish control over the said territory and to ensure respect for the Convention rights of individuals within that territory through diplomatic, legal or other appropriate means.⁷ The present report is therefore also informed by Ukraine's actions in accordance with its responsibility.

III BACKGROUND

15. The Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine has persisted for over four years in violation of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter. The prolongation of Russia's war of aggression has had a devastating impact on Ukraine with serious implications for European security and beyond. Respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, extending to its territorial waters, have been repeatedly affirmed as the basis for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace reflecting the constant position of the international community, as articulated in consecutive UN General Assembly resolutions.⁸

16. Civilian casualties, including amongst women and children, have continued to rise with losses spiking in recent months primarily due to a massive increase in the use of long-range aerial weapons. As of March 2026, according to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) 15 578 civilians had lost their lives and 43 352 were injured. However, the actual extent of civilian harm is believed to be considerably greater.⁹ Due to ongoing hostilities and occupation, more displacement occurred during the reporting period. As of December 2025, 3.7 million Ukrainians were internally displaced in areas controlled by the government of Ukraine, including 878 000 from the territories occupied by the Russian Federation.¹⁰

17. Notably, Ukraine's critical civilian and energy infrastructure has suffered significant damage exacerbating civilian hardship. The escalation of Russia's aerial attacks last winter severely disrupted the supply of electrical power, heating and water, creating a serious humanitarian emergency. Russia has also increasingly targeted Ukraine's railway, transport and Black Sea port infrastructure.

⁷ See *Shukurdzgyev and Kuzmin v. Russia and Ukraine* (Application nos. 45911/15 and 45913/15) of 5 May 2026.

⁸ UNGA Resolution A/RES/ES-11/10 adopted on 24 February 2026.

⁹ Of the total number of recorded casualties by HRMMU, 51 489 occurred in Ukraine-controlled territories and 7 441 in territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation. See OHCHR, "Ukraine: Protection of civilians in armed conflict - March 2026", 10 April 2026.

¹⁰ OHCHR, Forced displacement from territory of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation: forcible transfer, and deportation, barriers to return, and the rights of the internally displaced persons 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2025.

In response, Ukraine's air attacks on industrial and energy facilities in the territory of the Russian Federation intensified during the reporting period.

18. The resumption of peace talks with United States mediation was a notable diplomatic step towards a negotiated peaceful settlement of the conflict. Peaceful resolution efforts have, however, been fragile and susceptible to international security volatility, especially as attention shifted to tensions in the Middle East. A comprehensive cessation of hostilities remains to be agreed, while the pathway to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, in line with fundamental principles of international law, has remained elusive. The Russian Federation has repeatedly rejected a comprehensive ceasefire proposed by Ukraine while advancing conditions that further undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and fundamentally contradict the UN Charter. Russian state officials and political leaders have, on a number of occasions, called for pursuing the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine.

19. According to the Ukrainian authorities, approximately 3.5 million Ukrainians continue to reside in the temporarily occupied territories. The occupation has become more entrenched through the enactment of new Russian laws and policies aimed at undermining Ukraine's sovereignty over the occupied territories and separating them from the rest of Ukraine in flagrant breach of Russia's international obligations as an occupying Power. Notably, attempts to conduct the State Duma elections, scheduled for 20 September, in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, would not only be incompatible with fundamental principles of international law, but would also further aggravate the consequences of the full-scale military invasion and jeopardise peace efforts.

20. Furthermore, Russia's actions during the reporting bore witness to a systematic strategy that focuses not merely on control of territory, but also on asserting dominance on the Ukrainian population through structural violence, erasure of their national identity and grave violations of basic human rights in an increasingly coercive environment. The resulting trauma, discrimination, family separation, demographic restructuring and socio-economic hardships profoundly affected individuals and the community as a whole. They have forced Ukrainians, indigenous people as well as ethnic and religious minorities to navigate the choice between the struggle for survival and displacement, while also impeding returns of those who fled.

IV HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ARMED CONFLICT

Right to life

21. The right to life is a basic human right enshrined in Article 2 of the Convention, which ranks as one of its most fundamental provisions. It comprises two substantive obligations: the general obligation to protect the right to life and the prohibition of intentional deprivation of life. Having regard to its fundamental character, Article 2 also contains a procedural obligation to carry out an effective investigation into alleged breaches of its substantive limb. This includes cases where a person has disappeared in life-threatening circumstances.

In situations of international armed conflict, those safeguards continue to apply, albeit interpreted against the background of the provisions of international humanitarian law.¹¹

22. Persistent failure to ensure compliance with IHL provisions during hostilities remained a defining feature of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Indiscriminate and disproportionate military attacks using explosive weaponry with wide area effects, such as aerial bombardments, shelling and mines causing grave civilian harm, including violations of the right to life were frequently reported.

23. Notably, the overwhelming deployment of short-range first-person view (FPV) drones was identified as a leading cause of casualties in the frontline areas and adjacent communities. Russian military units on the left bank of the Dnipro River have been identified as launching FPV drone attacks on the city of Kherson, spreading fear and terror among the civilian population on a daily basis.¹² Other densely populated regional capitals, such as Kharkiv, but also more distant locations, such as the city of Zaporizhzhia, have been increasingly affected. Serious concerns persisted in relation to the targeting of humanitarian actors by Russian armed forces, including during evacuations. While the vast majority of civilian casualties were recorded in the Ukraine-controlled areas, Russian occupying authorities reported instances of death and injuries among civilians attributed to attacks of Ukrainian armed forces in the temporarily occupied territories.¹³ However, the lack of independent access impeded objective verification of such incidents.

24. International human rights organisations continued to document other grave violations of the right to life, including extrajudicial executions of Ukrainian military personnel by Russian armed forces in violation of Geneva Conventions. Between mid-November 2025 and January 2026, OHCHR recorded credible allegations about the execution of 37 Ukrainian servicemen in 18 incidents, a significant spike.¹⁴ It also documented the extrajudicial execution of four Russian POWs by Ukrainian armed forces.¹⁵

¹¹ European Court of Human Rights: Guide on Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, updated on 31 August 2022.

¹² Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, Report to the UN General Assembly (A/80/497), 21 October 2025.

¹³ OSCE/ODIHR Eighth Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine – 16 December 2025.

¹⁴ OHCHR Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2025 – 31 May 2026.

¹⁵ OHCHR Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 1 June – 30 November 2025, 9 December 2025.

25. According to available information, Russian armed forces carried out summary executions of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories. In one case reported in September 2025, Russian military personnel in the occupied Kherson region reportedly executed a man whom they accused of collaborating with the Ukrainian armed forces, as well as a married couple who allegedly hid him in their home.¹⁶ In total, since 24 February 2022, OHCHR has documented 182 extrajudicial executions, including in detention, in areas controlled by the Russian armed forces.¹⁷

26. In frontline areas, relentless hostilities and bombardments have decimated civilian infrastructure, including healthcare facilities leading to the collapse of basic services and total breakdown of conditions necessary for life. During the visit to Ukraine, the attention of the Council of Europe Secretariat's delegation was drawn to the precarious situation in Oleshky, in the occupied territory of the Kherson region situated close to the frontline. Its residents, including children, continue to live at extreme risk of FPV drones attacks, extensive mine contamination and are also cut off from access to food, medicine and basic necessities such as electricity and gas. According to international monitors, such deterioration was especially evident in the cities of Myrnohrad and Pokrovsk.

27. The Council of Europe received reports indicating a sharp increase of mortality rates in the temporarily occupied city of Mariupol compared to pre-full-scale military invasion indicators. This appears to be associated with the demographic composition of the remaining population after the 2022 brutal siege and the limited access to healthcare, allegedly due to a shortage of doctors, as well as the overburdening of medical facilities during active hostilities. Other health risks have been reported in connection with water contamination and limited supply of drinking water in the temporarily occupied parts of the Donetsk region.

Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

28. The prohibition of torture and ill-treatment is one of the most fundamental international human rights law norms enshrined in Article 3 of the Convention and provides for no exceptions under any circumstances. Together with Article 2, it is considered a peremptory norm which reflects one of the basic values of democratic societies. The procedural obligation under Article 3 continues to apply in difficult security conditions, including in a context of armed conflict.¹⁸ Torture and ill-treatment committed during the armed conflict may constitute war crimes and they may constitute crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack, with knowledge of the attack, directed against a civilian population. According to the European Court of Human Rights, the systematic rape of women as a weapon of war is an act of extreme atrocity that amounts to torture.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ OHCHR, Four years since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine: key facts and findings, February 2026.

¹⁸ European Court of Human Rights: Guide on Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, updated on 31 August 2022. See also *Georgia v. Russia (III)*, (Appl. no. 38263/08), judgment of 21 January 2021.

¹⁹ ECtHR Grand Chamber, 9 July 2025 op. cit.

29. Numerous testimonies by Ukrainian POWs and civilians released during the reporting period provided further evidence that torture and inhuman treatment was systematically perpetrated in places of detentions and internment located in temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and the Russian Federation in a well-established pattern of conduct that engendered near total impunity. OHCHR documented torture or ill-treatment in at least 114 official places of detention.²⁰ It also reported that it was able to identify 31 penitentiary staff members, including senior officers, across eight facilities in both the Russian Federation and temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, who were directly involved in acts of torture and ill treatment.²¹

30. Consistent with previous reports, new evidence continued to reveal a similarity of methods used and apparent co-ordination across various facilities which in turn has been indicative of a co-ordinated policy perpetrated with the intent of inflicting severe pain and punishment, ultimately strengthening Russian control over the temporarily occupied territories. Torture and ill-treatment appeared to be systematically used to extract confessions to support the criminal prosecutions of POWs and unlawfully detained civilians, which saw a sharp increase during the reporting period. In a case reported in August 2025, a woman from Zaporizhzhia sentenced to 15 years on “treason” charges appeared in court with visible signs of torture such as broken teeth and discoloured fingernail consistent with electric shocks.²²

31. Former POWs and civilian detainees continued to provide consistent accounts of poor detention conditions in both official and unofficial Russian facilities, which in some cases may amount to torture. Overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, insufficient food and water, inadequate or denied medical care appeared to be commonplace, whereas in many cases physical abuse, psychological coercion, forced labour, humiliation and propaganda activities occurred.²³

32. Deprivation of food in Russian detention facilities remained systematic. For example, POWs temporarily interned in the Olenivka and Sartana facilities (in the temporarily occupied Donetsk region) reported dire detention conditions, little food, no water and no beds.²⁴ Cases where civilian detainees reportedly experienced hunger and significant body weight loss have been reported. Based on interviews with released civilian detainees, OHCHR identified at least 87 places of detention where they suffered from lack of food or food of insufficient nutritious quality.²⁵

²⁰ OHCHR, Treatment of Civilians Deprived of their Liberty in the Context of the Armed Attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, 23 September 2025.

²¹ OHCHR, 9 December 2025 op. cit.

²² Ibid.

²³ OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report on Possible Violations and Abuses of IHL and IHRL, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, related to the Treatment of Ukrainian POWs by the Russian Federation, 25 September 2025

²⁴ ODIHR, 16 December 2025 op. cit.

²⁵ OHCHR, 23 September 2025 op. cit.

33. Serious concerns persist regarding failure to ensure timely and adequate access to medical care for the unlawfully detained Ukrainian civilians in the facilities in the temporarily occupied territories and the Russian Federation. As relayed to the Council of Europe Secretariat, more than 80 political prisoners from Crimea required urgent medical attention, including due to conditions allegedly developed from suffering torture and ill-treatment. At least in two cases, the health state of the persons concerned was characterised as critical.

34. Of particular concern has been the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), which can constitute a form of torture, affecting POWs and civilians irrespective of gender and including children, in detention or outside custodial settings. According to the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) of Ukraine, 56 CRSV cases were reported of which 30 involved women and 26 involved men. Witness testimonies highlighted a wide range of CRSV acts including rape and threat thereof leaving the survivors scarred physically and psychologically.

35. During the reporting period, the PGO had launched criminal proceedings in 384 new cases of alleged torture. Indictments relating to conflict-related sexual violence concerned 60 cases. Other steps by Ukraine to meet its human rights obligations included the entry into force of legislation granting legal and social protection to survivors of sexual violence on 18 June 2025.²⁶

Right to liberty and security

36. The Convention guarantees the right to liberty and security to everyone. The authorities have an obligation to ensure that any detention is lawful based on a procedure prescribed by law and to ensure Convention compliant conditions of detention. As regards detention taking place during an international armed conflict, the safeguards under Article 5 of the Convention must be interpreted and applied taking into account the context and the provisions of international humanitarian law.²⁷

37. The Council of Europe Secretariat has continued to receive comprehensive information attesting to a large-scale practice of unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of liberty in a general climate of coercion and fear across the occupied territories. Interlocutors described a constant threat of unlawful detention faced by the local population. According to the Office of the Verkhovna Rada's Commissioner for Human Rights, 1 700 cases of unlawfully detained civilians had been confirmed although it estimated that the total number is as high as 16 000.²⁸

²⁶ Law of Ukraine No. 4067-IX "On Legal and Social Protection of Survivors of Sexual Violence Related to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and Providing Immediate Interim Reparations".

²⁷ See for example, Grand Chamber judgment *Hassan v. the United Kingdom* (Application no. 29750/09), 16 September 2014.

²⁸ The PGO of Ukraine informed the Council of Europe Secretariat that Ukrainian law-enforcement bodies have registered over 2 100 criminal cases leading to the identification of more than 6 700 civilians who had been unlawfully detained during the period 24 February 2022 – 30 March 2026.

38. Russian occupying authorities continued to detain individuals for imputed affiliation with Ukrainian armed forces or government and generally any real or perceived opposition to the occupation. Witnesses recounted that detentions occurred on the streets if phone checks conducted by security forces revealed links to Ukraine. Arbitrary deprivation of liberty of both POWs and civilians also ensued from the enforcement of Russian Federation's criminal and administrative law in violation of obligations incumbent upon an occupying Power. Furthermore, the Russian Federation reportedly has not established an IHL-compliant procedure of internment of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories resulting in a lack of the most basic legal safeguards.²⁹

39. According to international monitors, journalists and media workers, human rights activists, members of various religious and ethnic groups were particularly targeted. At the time of the writing of the report, three former Ukrainian personnel of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe convicted on "espionage" and "high treason" charges remained imprisoned. Alarming, in many cases individuals continued to be held *incommunicado*, amounting to enforced disappearance, with Russian occupying authorities refusing to reveal/confirm their whereabouts. For example, at least 44 people are believed to be held *incommunicado* in Pre-trial facility (SIZO) Nr 2 in Simferopol. In instances where the detainees' whereabouts became known, communication or visits were often prohibited or severely restricted.³⁰

40. In meetings with the Council of Europe Secretariat's delegation, the Ukrainian authorities reiterated their concerns in relation to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in the Russian-occupied Enerhodar. They held that the situation of the 35 ZNPP personnel resembled effectively a hostage situation. The Russian occupying authorities had reportedly unlawfully detained ZNPP members and their relatives while initiating spurious charges against them to coerce them into co-operation. It was reported that Russia's actions continued to jeopardise the operation of the facility and, more broadly, nuclear safety. Pressure, intimidation, and unlawful detention of operational personnel have led to fears that the safe and secure functioning of the nuclear facility would be jeopardised.

41. During the reporting period, the forcible transfer of Ukrainian prisoners within the temporarily occupied territories, and their unlawful deportation to penitentiary institutions in the Russian Federation persisted in violation of international humanitarian law. In the absence of a return mechanism to Ukraine, the Russian authorities continued to deport Ukrainian convicts who had served their terms via third countries. The number of deportations through the Russia-Georgia state border significantly increased in June 2025 resulting in at least 90 people being detained at a border facility due to lack of valid Ukrainian documents which impeded their entry/transit through Georgia. At the time of the delegation's visit, around 20 individuals remained in said facility. A durable solution to their situation remains pending.

²⁹ OHCHR, 23 September 2025, op cit. See also OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report, 25 September 2025.

³⁰ ODIHR, 16 December 2025 op. cit.

42. In a positive development, the number of POWs and civilians released from captivity increased significantly during the reporting period in connection with the resumption of peace talks in May 2025. Reportedly, over 6 000 POWs and 432 civilians had returned to Ukraine at the time of the fact-finding visit of the Council of Europe Secretariat's delegation. However, concerns persist over the inclusion of unlawfully detained civilians in the POW swaps due the risks of it encouraging a pattern of hostage taking. The Council of Europe Secretariat also received information about cases where civilian detainees who do not hold Russian citizenship were encouraged by the Russian occupying authorities to be put on exchange lists with a view to their deportation to Ukraine.

43. The humanitarian channel between the Ukrainian and Russian Ombudspersons continued to play a crucial role *inter alia* in facilitating the release of POWs and unlawfully detained civilians, establishing the whereabouts of detainees and family links and conducting visits in the places of detention with the support of third parties. The two Ombudspersons held a meeting in this format in Geneva, Switzerland, on 16 January 2026.

Right to a fair trial

44. The right to a fair trial includes a specific set of minimum rights to be ensured to persons charged with criminal offences. It also comprises the right to an impartial and independent tribunal.³¹ The Court has found the extension and application of Russia's law to the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea to be in contravention of the Convention, as interpreted in the light of IHL. Russian law therefore could not be regarded as "law" within the meaning of the Convention and any administrative practice based on that law could not be regarded as "lawful" or "in accordance with the law".³²

45. The period under review was characterised by a surge in sham convictions of Ukrainian POWs and unlawfully detained civilians on vague charges relating to "high treason", "sabotage", "espionage", as well as "extremism" and "terrorism". This appeared to contrast with the general trend in the Russian Federation where the numbers of politically motivated prosecutions reportedly decreased throughout 2025.³³ While this may in part be attributable to the completion of the transition period for the operationalisation of the "courts" (except Crimea), the extension and enforcement of Russian criminal jurisdiction over those territories remained fundamentally incompatible with the IHL and IHRL.

46. As regards civilians, it was noted that the proportion of "high treason" convictions (Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code) sharply increased compared to previous periods and accounted for more than half of all politically motivated prosecutions exemplifying the escalation of repression.³⁴

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

³² *Ukraine v. Russia (re Crimea)* (application nos. 20958/14 and 38334/18, Grand Chamber judgment of 25 June 2024).

³³ Repression in Russia in 2025. Overview by OVD-Info, 30 January 2026.

³⁴ For example, in Crimea only, up to 60 cases were reported in 2024–2025 compared with 9 cases in 2021–2023.

This trend was associated with the July 2022 expansion of the scope of Article 275 to include “switching to the enemy’s side”, allowing the targeting of individuals accused of trying to join Ukrainian forces or showing support online.³⁵ The nature of charges appeared to be determined by the possession or not of Russian citizenship.³⁶

47. “Courts” in the occupied territories effectively convicted some Ukrainian POWs for their mere participation in hostilities, in contravention with combatant immunity under international humanitarian law, reinforcing fair trial violation patterns. Captured servicemen from the Azov Regiment, Aidar and other Ukrainian combat units banned in the Russian Federation faced identical judgments on “terrorism” charges. In one such case, on 15 October 2025, 15 people associated with the Aidar battalion were reportedly sentenced to terms ranging from 15 to 21 years. It was furthermore reported that a growing number of Ukrainian POWs captured during the hostilities in the Kursk region of the Russian Federation were tried on terrorism charges, leading to perceived retaliation in the light of the Russian President’s earlier public statements qualifying Ukrainian military fighting in the region as “terrorists” subject to prosecution.

48. Consistent with the findings of previous reports, court proceedings in such cases were typically marred by systemic procedural shortcomings, including closed door hearings, limited access to case materials, as well as only Russian state-accorded legal aid or complete absence thereof. The systemic acceptance by “courts” of extraction of confessions through violent interrogation, a total absence of acquittals, as well as the severity of the sentences imposed were furthermore indicative of a pre-determined outcome, in manifest disregard of the presumption of innocence.

V HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF OCCUPATION

Consequences of forcible extension of Russian citizenship and documentation issues

49. The policy of forcibly imposing Russian citizenship on the population of the occupied territories constituted one of the most visible instruments of assimilation. It is estimated that 3.5 million Russian passports have been issued across the temporarily occupied territories to date.

50. On 10 September 2025, the deadline established by a Russian presidential decree requiring Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territories who did not wish to obtain Russian citizenship to register as foreign nationals or face deportation expired. The Council of Europe Secretariat was unable to obtain information on its practical consequences. However, a subsequent presidential decree removed all such deadlines, rendering the imposition of Russian citizenship an open-ended process.

³⁵ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation: Rule of fear: silencing dissent and anti-war expression in the Russian Federation in the name of national security A/80/382, 27 October 2025.

³⁶ Only Russian citizens can be charged with “high treason” under Article 275 of the Russian Code. Ukrainians who did not hold a Russian passport were more likely to be charged with espionage (Article 276 of the CC). See OVD Info op. cit.

51. Holding a Russian passport was a prerequisite for access to employment, education, healthcare, property and other social benefits engendering discrimination on the basis of nationality. Moreover, refusal continued to be seen as a sign of disloyalty and appeared to be fraught with retaliation. As reported by Ukrainian human rights organisations, a woman in Simferopol went missing on 15 November 2025, allegedly for refusing a Russian passport. She was later charged with the administrative offence of “propaganda or public display of Nazi or extremist symbols”, “discrediting” the Russian military, and petty hooliganism punishable by administrative detention and fines.

52. The coercive environment has forced the overwhelming majority of the population to acquire a Russian passport. Based on the information available to the Council of Europe, only 1% of the residents of Mariupol currently do not hold Russian citizenship. Moreover, formal registration mechanisms applicable to foreign nationals under Russian legislation are not consistently implemented in practice. According to the OHCHR, most of residents of the temporarily occupied territories who had not obtained a Russian passport had left by December 2025 which could constitute forced displacement.³⁷ Yet in other cases, the Russian occupying authorities deported detainees who they had stripped off Russian citizenship. On 31 July 2025, Russia adopted legislation which drastically expanded the list of crimes which lead to the loss of previously granted citizenship, to include terrorism, participation in undesirable organisations etc.

53. While Ukraine does not recognise Russian passports issued in the occupied territories, the Council of Europe Secretariat was made aware of at least one case in which a holder of such document faced termination of employment in a state body in the government-controlled territory, a decision subsequently upheld by a court.

54. Meanwhile, Ukrainians from temporarily occupied territories reportedly faced difficulties in obtaining Ukrainian civil status documents. Consistent with previous indications, the Council of Europe Secretariat was informed that in the absence of civil status records, birth and death certificates could be established only through court proceedings. While a special simplified judicial procedure is in place and the authorities have taken measures to ensure that civil registry offices promptly implement court decisions, cases have been reported in which courts rejected parents' requests for birth certificates by failing to take adequate account of the occupation context.³⁸ The introduction of an administrative procedure through a separate draft law has been initiated. In meetings with the Council of Europe Secretariat's delegation, international and local stakeholders advocated for its adoption without delay to prevent the risk of statelessness from materialising.

³⁷ OHCHR, Forced displacement from territory of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation: forcible transfer, and deportation, barriers to return, and the rights of the internally displaced persons 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2025.

³⁸ *ibid*

55. In addition, it was reported that ID verification requirements introduced by the Ukrainian Government in March 2025 have created difficulties in accessing pensions payments for many across the temporarily occupied territories. While noting the objective complexities of verification and provision of services in the occupation conditions, interlocutors of the Council of Europe Secretariat underscored the need for an urgent legislative remedy restoring access to this fundamental socio-economic right.

The situation of Ukrainians, indigenous people and persons belonging to national minorities

56. During the period under review, the Russian Federation continued to adopt and implement policies and measures with a clear objective of undermining Ukrainian identity, history and culture in contravention of the principle of prohibition of discrimination, to erase diversity and to impose a singular Russian identity.

57. On 25 November 2025, Russia introduced a National Policy Strategy until 2036. In addition to listing steps taken since 2023 to incorporate the temporarily occupied regions into the “legal, social, educational, cultural and information space of the Russian Federation”, the strategy stressed the need for “additional measures to strengthen all-Russian civic identity” and attempts to involve approximately 2.56 million residents in the said territories, including children, in Russian State initiatives. In a well-established pattern, Russian occupying authorities retaliated against the free expression of Ukrainian identity and symbols by conflating it with Nazi propaganda and extremism and bringing it within the scope of broad anti-extremism provisions that allowed for abusive interpretation and arbitrariness.

58. In the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, indigenous Crimean Tatar, including women, continued to be disproportionately targeted by repressions, which included arbitrary arrests, raids and searches of private residences and places of worship, disruption of religious services and other intrusive actions. As previously reported, criminal cases against Crimean Tatars constituted a majority of politically motivated prosecutions in the peninsula. Throughout the reporting period, the defendants’ appeals in several cases were rejected by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. In addition, according to the available information, of 64 women currently in custody, 52 were Crimean Tatars. In a case relayed to the Council of Europe Secretariat, four Crimean Tatar women were detained in October 2025 over alleged participation in Hizb ut-Tahrir. Their spouses had been previously arrested on the same charges.

59. On 3 April, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine granted the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People the legal status of the representative body of the Crimean Tatar people. The decision enhances the protection of the rights of Crimean Tatars and strengthens the institutional framework for their participation in decision-making, including through consultations with the authorities on matters affecting their rights and legitimate interests.

For their part, the Russian authorities maintained the ban on the Mejlis, pursuant to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation's 2016 decision.³⁹

60. In exchanges with the Council of Europe Secretariat, the Ukrainian authorities raised concerns about the impact of the war of aggression and ongoing occupation on other indigenous people of Ukraine, the Karaites and Krymchaks.

61. Amidst the ongoing occupation, the situation of ethnic minorities has remained overlooked. The full-scale military invasion shattered community life, while the impact on language and cultural life has compromised their sense of identity and belonging. Russia's brutal siege and subsequent occupation of Mariupol particularly affected North Azovian Greeks (Urums and Rumeans) a community of over 100 000 members before the full-scale invasion. At the time of writing of the report, all 76 settlements where they compactly live were under Russian occupation, with many members of the community having reportedly fled the hostilities, relocating to government-controlled territories.

62. In meetings with the delegation, a representative of the German minority equally noted that human rights abuses affecting all the population groups contributed to a general feeling of anguish that had forced members of her community to flee the temporarily occupied territories and abroad.

63. As regards the Roma population, large numbers are estimated to have been displaced from Donetsk and Luhansk mainly to the Transcarpathia region in western Ukraine.

Cultural heritage

64. In addition to direct material damage to thousands of cultural heritage sites across Ukraine since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, Russian policies in the temporarily occupied territories continued to contribute to the gradual erasure of Ukrainian cultural distinctiveness and the severance of their cultural bonds with the rest of Ukraine. The impact of such actions has been acutely felt in the cultural landscape of the temporarily occupied territories where the erasure of social and cultural memories has been evident in the Russian occupying authorities' approach to the intangible cultural heritage of communities through distortion, banning, or replacement.

65. Ukrainian museums in the temporarily occupied territories have been targeted, leading to extensive looting, as well as illicit removal and transfer of exhibits. According to the Ukrainian authorities' estimates, tens of thousands of cultural artefacts from collections of national importance have been unlawfully appropriated while more than 2.3 million museum artefacts remain in the temporarily occupied territories at risk of irretrievable loss or entry into the black market.

³⁹ It is recalled that in 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Russia violated its international obligations by keeping the ban on Mejlis, contrary to the 2017 provisional measures order of the court. The UN General Assembly has repeatedly called on Russia to lift the ban.

Cases of cultural objects transferred within the temporarily occupied territories have been difficult to investigate.

66. In the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea, archaeological excavations in at least 25 cases reported since 2014 are of particular concern. According to open-source data, between 2014 and November 2025, more than 1 700 permits were issued for conducting archaeological excavations in its territory. The Russian occupying authorities have reportedly issued more than 50 permits for similar archaeological works in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. In Crimea, construction of infrastructure near archaeological sites has led to damage and loss of archaeological heritage.

67. In October 2025, the Government of Ukraine adopted a decision to implement a pilot project of the Register of the Museum Fund of Ukraine as a national digital system ensuring the accounting, preservation and protection of museum objects. The platform enables museums to independently enter information about museum objects, including unlawfully transferred property, supporting tracing efforts by law enforcement.

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

68. Severe restrictions imposed on religious communities not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church have significantly undermined freedom of religion and belief across the temporarily occupied territories. These restrictions amount to discrimination on religious grounds, eroding the region's rich religious diversity—a key aspect of Ukrainian cultural life, history, and identity.

69. In 2025, the Crimean Diocese of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was formally dissolved following its gradual uprooting from the peninsula. While some Catholic parishes nominally remain, they are mainly limited to Crimea where they were able to re-register and face severe limitations elsewhere, as illustrated by the ban on the Greek Catholic Church in the temporarily occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia region. Other Christian denominations have continued to face threats, confiscation of religious property and searches of places of worship and residences which severely restrict their ability to practise their faith.

70. The Russian occupying authorities continued to criminally prosecute representatives of religious communities based on the vague provisions of the Russian anti-extremism legislation. According to Ukrainian authorities, 104 Crimean Tatar Muslims were in detention mainly for their alleged affiliation to the Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned in the Russian Federation by a decision of the Supreme Court. In a similar vein, new extremism-related criminal cases and sentences of Jehovah Witnesses were reported. At the time of the Council of Europe Secretariat's delegation visit to Ukraine, 33 members of the community remained in custody.

71. In addition to above-mentioned provisions, Russian legislation prohibiting missionary activity appears to be used as an instrument of control and pressure on unregistered communities.⁴⁰ Between July and December 2025, law enforcement agents raided at least eight places of worship in the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Six of them belonged to Council of Churches of Baptist communities, the other two to Muslim and Pentecostal congregations. Following these raids, administrative cases were initiated against religious leaders resulting in fines for “missionary activity”.⁴¹ On 21 March 2026, a Baptist pastor reportedly had his residence permit revoked by the Russian Migration Service and was ordered to leave the temporarily occupied territories within two weeks.⁴²

72. In January 2026, the Russian occupying authorities seized the historic 16th century Khan-Jami Mosque in Yevpatoria, in the occupied Crimea, depriving the local religious community of the possibility to conduct Friday prayer.

73. The ongoing failure to investigate serious human rights abuses suffered by religious leaders in the occupied territories - including unlawful deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearance, torture, ill-treatment and deportation - continues to foster a climate of impunity and lawlessness.

Access to education, including mother tongue-based education

74. The right to education enshrined in Article 2 of Protocol 1 to the Convention is considered indispensable in the furtherance of other human rights. According to the European Court of Human Rights, this article must be interpreted in harmony with other rules of international law. Most importantly, it is closely linked with the right of everyone, including parents and children, “to respect for his private and family life”, “freedom of thought, conscience and religion”, and “freedom to receive and impart information and ideas”. In addition, Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 is also closely linked to Article 14 of the Convention and to the prohibition of discrimination.⁴³

75. The imposition of the Russian education system in the temporarily occupied territories in violation of IHL provisions has played a critical role in the pursuit of indoctrination and assimilation. Education has been effectively reoriented to promote official Russian narratives justifying the war of aggression against Ukraine and denying Ukraine’s independent statehood, including through distortion of historical truth. Children were reportedly exposed to pro-Russian indoctrination already at the pre-school age, indicating a deliberate policy targeting children at the earliest stages of cognitive and identity formation. These measures violated the right of parents to ensure the education of their children in conformity with their own convictions, as well as the right of children to education free from ideological coercion.

⁴⁰ Article 5.26 of the Russian Administrative Code.

⁴¹ https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=3026.

⁴² https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=3037.

⁴³ See Guide to Article 2 of Protocol 1 to the Convention, last updated 31 August 2022.

76. School programmes continued to place an increasing emphasis on military-patriotic upbringing in line with the Russian federal programmes such as the Comprehensive Plan for Military-Patriotic and Spiritual-Moral Education, which institutionalises the militarisation of children and youth as a long-term state policy. Notably, the Plan envisages a direct role for Russian war veterans in education activities through teaching relevant subjects such as the “Fundamentals of Security and Defence of the Fatherland”, as well as involvement in youth military associations.⁴⁴ The number of military cadet classes in schools across the occupied territories significantly increased; in the occupied part of the Kherson region alone, the figure reportedly rose from 9 to 20 over the course of the past year. As previously reported, the curriculum of these classes is directly shaped by Russian law-enforcement agencies, including the Russian Investigative Committee and the Ministry of the Interior.

77. Beyond the school system, youth military organisations and their operations in the temporarily occupied territories, *Yunarmia*, *Movement of the First*, *Avangard* and others, formed an integral part of the broader education milieu of the temporarily occupied territories. Their role and activities expanded with increased financial support from the Russian state budget. As of 2025, *Yunarmia* counted 1.85 million participants aged 8 to 18 in the Russian Federation, including 42 000 children in the temporarily occupied territories. In October 2025, the organisation signed a co-operation agreement with the Russian occupying authorities of Crimea attesting to its influence. Large-scale placement of children in summer camps combining recreational activities with military training gave rise to further concerns of separation of families, pressure to reject Ukrainian identity and potentially future involvement in the war of aggression against Ukraine, after their coming of age. Over 200 such facilities receiving Ukrainian children in the occupied territories and the Russian Federation have been identified. According to Russian authorities, around 85 000 children from the occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions attended these camps in 2025.

78. The streamlining of the education system into Russian has produced important discriminatory effects from the point of view of language rights. Access to Ukrainian mother tongue-based instruction was effectively suppressed in favour of Russian-language teaching. Ukrainian language and literature were removed from the federal school curriculum list of optional subjects, depriving Ukrainian children of all access to their mother tongue in further violation of their rights.⁴⁵ Provision of Russian-language textbooks was itself reported as insufficient, further limiting children’s access to quality education. Families continued to face intimidation and threats of removal of parental rights for failing to enrol children in Russian schools, which remains mandatory. Lack of access to Ukrainian-language education has been cited as one of the primary reasons compelling parents and teachers to relocate to government-controlled territory.

⁴⁴ <https://almenda.org/en/prezentaciya-zvitu-politika-rosi%d1%97-shhodo-znishhennya-identichnosti-ditej-na-tot-ukra%d1%97ni-pidsumki-2025-roku/>.

⁴⁵ Decision of the Russian Ministry of Education, dated 8 October 2025.

79. These changes were indicative of an educational policy designed to erase Ukrainian identity and foster loyalty to the Russian state. They also created a foreseeable risk of future military enlistment in the Russian Armed Forces, and direct participation in the war against their own homeland.⁴⁶

80. In this context, making access to continued Ukrainian education available for children and young people in/from temporarily occupied territories, while ensuring the quality of the process and safety remains a priority for Ukrainian authorities. As part of a comprehensive policy, the government continued to implement a set of measures ranging from distance learning facilities and a patronage system to simplified admission to higher education institutions through a specially allocated quota, while providing also financial, housing and psychological support to those returning to government-controlled territory. Notably, while education certificates and diplomas issued under occupation are not recognised, learning outcomes can be assessed through a specific procedure allowing for the continuation of studies in the Ukrainian education system. According to Ukrainian NGOs, these measures have been implemented in a highly challenging environment marked by obstruction in the temporarily occupied territories but also the broader integration needs in the government-controlled territory. They noted that the number of Ukrainian children returning to the government-controlled territory had reportedly declined during last year, arguably as a result of increased difficulty to leave the occupied territories, as well as related security and other risks.

Freedom of expression

81. Russian occupying authorities significantly curtailed freedom of expression, including the right to impart and receive information. The expression of pro-Ukrainian or anti-war positions was systematically prosecuted. Such actions continued to lead to politically motivated administrative prosecutions for “discreditation of Russian armed forces” (Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences). In the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea, around 1 700 court cases had been recorded as of February 2026, highlighting the scale of repression. According to the Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, a large majority of these cases ended in fines being imposed. It was noted that the number of such cases initiated in Crimea has been increasing over the years as compared to the Russian Federation.⁴⁷ While the vast majority of such instances concerned public expressions on the internet, in some cases proceedings targeted individuals for their private messages.

⁴⁶ The PGO of Ukraine has launched criminal proceedings against 34 individuals involved in the “militarisation” of children in temporarily occupied territories as well 18 individuals, including regional leaders, associated with *Yunarmia*. In addition, the PGO has initiated in 682 cases related to the implementation of the Russian education system in the temporarily occupied territories involving 440 individuals.

⁴⁷ Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences reportedly remained the most widely applied provision in politically motivated administrative cases. Yet in 2025, 1434 cases were reported compared to 2158 in 2024. According to open-source data temporarily occupied Crimea appears to have the highest number of such cases. See OVD-Info op. cit.

82. Public display of Ukrainian symbols and expressions was also punishable as a separate administrative offence (Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences). Albeit less frequent, various Russian criminal law provisions have been instrumental in the crackdown on media freedom. On 23 October 2025, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don, in the Russian Federation, sentenced a woman, administrator of the Telegram channel “Melitopol is Ukraine”, to 14 years in prison during a closed hearing. She was convicted under the Russian Criminal Code of ‘committing a terrorist attack’, ‘espionage’ and ‘participating in a terrorist organisation’. She had been detained since August 2023.

83. There were no new reports of arrests of journalists in 2025. However, according to Ukraine’s Institute of Mass Information, 26 Ukrainian journalists and media workers remain in detention, including one held *incommunicado*. During the reporting period, several persons including a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist from Crimea and two Crimean Tatar citizen journalists were released. However, at least in two cases, the individuals concerned were re-detained despite suffering from serious health issues.

84. The information space was subject to tight control undermining the freedom to receive information. The Russian occupying authorities continued to block the broadcasting of Ukrainian TV and radio channels while key Ukrainian news websites were outlawed as unwanted. Russian state media narratives providing negative coverage of Ukraine remained dominant. Online censorship and internet disruptions carried out by the Russian authorities were prevalent and intensified against a backdrop of increasingly tight restrictions on the internet in the Russian Federation. The Russian occupying authorities also blocked satellite and internet connections and increasingly promoted the Russian MAX messenger service while restricting the functions of its competitors which prompted data protection concerns.

85. During the reporting period, the State Duma of the Russian Federation continued to tighten Russia’s “anti-extremism” legislation provisions to further restrict access to information. Draft amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses were proposed, introducing fines for “searching for or accessing knowingly extremist materials,” including via a VPN.

Freedom of movement

86. IHRL guarantees everyone the right to freedom of movement within the borders of the state where they are located, and the right to leave and enter their own country which includes freedom to choose one’s residence. Restrictions placed on the exercise of these rights must be in accordance with the law, and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the maintenance of *ordre public*, for the prevention of crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.⁴⁸ In addition, collective expulsions are expressly prohibited.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ See Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 to the Convention.

⁴⁹ See Article 3 of Protocol No. 4 to the Convention.

87. Freedom of movement to and from the temporarily occupied territories remains severely restricted. Active hostilities along an extended frontline have effectively sealed those territories off from the rest of Ukraine. Reaching government-controlled territory is possible only via the Russian Federation, Belarus and other third countries, through a circuitous, costly and potentially unsafe journey.

88. A humanitarian land corridor operates through the Mokrany–Domanove border crossing point between Belarus and Ukraine, which otherwise remains officially closed to regular traffic. According to the UNHCR, the number of Ukrainians arriving from the occupied territories through this corridor has increased since 2024, when the previous humanitarian corridor between Ukraine and the Russian Federation was closed. In 2025, 10 000 arrivals were recorded. Family reunification, deteriorating security conditions, access to Ukrainian-language education and the need to restore access to pensions were cited as the principal reasons for departure from the occupied territories.⁵⁰ Valid Ukrainian documents are required for crossing, which may include return certificates (so-called “white passports”), typically obtained at the Ukrainian consulate in Minsk. The duration of travel depends on the place of origin and is reported to last two to three days.

89. Departure from the occupied territories towards the Russian Federation requires undergoing mandatory “filtration” procedures conducted by Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) at established checkpoints involving invasive and abusive interrogations and checks of electronic devices aimed at identifying any links to the Ukrainian Armed Forces or, more broadly, any indication of loyalty to Ukraine. Filtration procedures continued to expose individuals to a substantial risk of arbitrary arrest and other human rights abuses. Filtration procedures were also conducted at Sheremetyevo Airport in Moscow, which serves as the only entry point to the Russian Federation for Ukrainians wishing to return to the occupied territories. Denials of entry following filtration were reportedly frequent and based on vague national security grounds.⁵¹ According to the Russian state media, Russian border authorities imposed extensive entry bans of 20 up to 50 years for alleged links to Ukrainian armed forces and security agencies and negative attitude towards the “Special Military Operation” and the Russian Federation. Russian courts have continued to reject related appeals.⁵²

Right to property

90. The Council of Europe Secretariat received information indicative of an accelerating pace of expropriations across the temporarily occupied territories. While the Russian occupying authorities used different grounds for seizing property, procedures remained arbitrary and disproportionately affected displaced Ukrainians who fled to Ukrainian government-controlled areas, giving rise to a discriminatory practice.

⁵⁰ UNHCR.

⁵¹ OHCHR, March 2026, op. cit.

⁵² <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/24505655>.

91. In the temporarily occupied parts of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions, Russian occupying authorities continued to designate as “abandoned” properties which their owners were unable to register under the Russian law. The criteria for initiating proceedings remained at the discretion of the Russian occupying authorities. In some reported cases, owners had continued to pay utility bills. Possession of a Russian passport and in-person appearance were required for re-registration. The extremely short deadlines (30 days) compounded by severe restrictions on access to the temporarily occupied territories significantly constrained the ability of legitimate owners to assert their property rights. “Abandoned” property was transferred to “municipal ownership” by the “courts” and could be subsequently allocated to third parties. In Mariupol, according to the Russian occupying authorities such apartments were added to the compensatory housing fund and allocated to citizens of the Russian Federation “whose residential properties were lost as a result of hostilities on the territory of the “Donetsk People’s Republic”.

92. In December 2025, a new procedure was introduced through federal law, providing for transferring property to State or municipal ownership without court proceedings. The law also reportedly formalises the existing practise of leasing such property to Russian law enforcement, to local residents as social housing, or transfer of ownership to Russian citizens.⁵³

93. In the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, the Russian occupying authorities pursued expropriations under the guise of “nationalisation”, targeting citizens of “unfriendly states” including a majority of Ukrainians who have fled the peninsula. According to the Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, nationalisation of property affected 714 households and legal entities. Expropriations also concerned property designated by the Russian occupying authorities as illegally obtained prior to the occupation. Foreigners remained prohibited from owning land.

Conscription

94. Mandatory conscription of Ukrainian men aged 18 to 30 from the temporarily occupied territories into the Russian armed forces persisted despite it being strictly prohibited under the Geneva Conventions. As one of the immediate consequences of the imposition of Russian citizenship, subjecting this category of population to the Russian military service has also purportedly served to foster allegiance to the occupying Power in manifest violation of international humanitarian law norms. Ukrainian authorities underlined that conscription furthermore violated the right to prohibition of forced labour, the right to liberty and security as well as the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

⁵³ OHCHR. March 2026, op. cit.

95. As of the end of 2025, 46 327 Ukrainian men from the temporarily occupied territories were reportedly conscripted into the Russian army since the start of the full-scale invasion.⁵⁴ Most of them came from the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Conscription efforts were further intensified through the introduction of a year-round conscription period by presidential decree on 29 December 2025.

96. While as a rule conscripts were not assigned to direct combat duties, the risk of placing them in areas that could potentially be targeted by ongoing hostilities has been documented. Concerns persisted on conscription reportedly being accompanied by pressure or coercion to sign professional contracts for enrolment in the Russian armed forces and subsequent involvement in the hostilities. According to the information provided to the Council of Europe Secretariat by the Ukrainian authorities, the number of persons from the temporarily occupied territory who were killed in combat increased during the reporting period. For example, between 24 February 2022 and 18 August 2025, 2 104 persons serving in Russian armed formations from Crimea were reportedly killed, including 1 313 Ukrainian citizens.

97. Evasion of military service remains a punishable offence. In the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea, for instance, “courts” have handed down guilty verdicts in over 200 cases since conscription was extended to the peninsula following its illegal annexation in 2014.

Gender aspects

98. According to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has resulted in the violation of the right to life of many Ukrainian women, as well as their ability to enjoy basic human rights. It has put many of them at a particular risk of insecurity, trafficking and violence, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and has had a particularly disproportionate impact on older women and women with disabilities.

99. In the occupied territories, CRSV-related crimes have particularly affected girls, as victims, as well as children, where the mother was a victim of sexual violence. In some cases, survivors reportedly had to relocate multiple times after violent assault and repeated rape or did not report out of fear of trauma for themselves and their children.⁵⁵

100. During the visit of the Council of Europe Secretariat’s delegation, several interlocutors drew attention to the growing number of women who were subject to arbitrary detention. Reportedly, at least 64 Ukrainian women were held in pre-trial detention, although this figure did not take into account those held *incommunicado*. Arbitrary detentions further illustrated the suffering of families, notably women left behind in occupied areas.

⁵⁴ See <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/russia-forcibly-drafted-over-46-000-ukrainians-1763480426.html>

⁵⁵ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 9 March 2026, op. cit.

VI FORCIBLY TRANSFERRED AND UNLAWFULLY DEPORTED CHILDREN

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

102. As of March 2026, Ukrainian authorities had officially confirmed 20 570 cases⁵⁶ of unlawful deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children, however, real numbers have been difficult to verify.⁵⁷ New cases potentially amounting to forcible transfer within the occupied territories continued to occur. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine established that in January 2026, Russian occupying structures reported the transfer to foster families of 42 children illegally taken in 2022 from the Kherson Regional Children's Home (see previous reports). As of March 2026, the Commission had confirmed 1 205 cases of children in this situation.⁵⁸

103. In meetings with the Council of Europe Secretariat, Ukrainian authorities underlined that the return of these children was a central element to achieving a comprehensive, just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. Although reunification of over 2 000 children was achieved thanks to concerted efforts of third countries, the Ukrainian Ombudsperson and Ukrainian NGOs,⁵⁹ the large majority of deported children have not returned, leaving families and legal guardians still looking for them. In May 2025, the Ukrainian delegation submitted to the Russian delegation a list of 300 children in the framework of their meeting in Istanbul, Türkiye. In meetings with the delegation however, representatives of the Ukrainian authorities held that none of the children had returned based on provided lists. Their prolonged separation from families and caregivers not only violated their right to private and family life but created a serious risk of violations under Article 3 and 5 of the Convention in view of reported severity of the children's treatment and the exceptional circumstances involved.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ The forcible transfer and unlawful deportation of 20 000 Ukrainian children is being investigated by the PGO of Ukraine, resulting in indictments against 12 individuals. Among those facing criminal charges are two deputies of the Russian State Duma, including the leader of a political party and his spouse.

⁵⁷ Ukrainian authorities maintained that the officially reported numbers reflected the minimum information that Ukraine has been able to collect without access to the occupied territories, the children's actual place of residence and the official registers of the Russian Federation. In submissions to the Council of Europe Secretariat, they referred to the Russian Federation's own official reports indicating that since February 2022, the country has received approximately 4.8 million residents of Ukraine, of whom more than 700 000 are children.

⁵⁸ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/61/61, 9 March 2026.

⁵⁹ The role of the governments of Qatar, South Africa and the Holy See, as well as the United States (through the personal involvement of the First Lady of the United States) has been particularly instrumental in facilitating the search and return.

⁶⁰ These circumstances included the coercive element of the children's removal from and stay outside Ukraine, the lack of opportunity to contact family members, excessive difficulties faced by caregivers seeking to reunite with children, the holding of a number of children in various facilities and institutions throughout Russia or temporarily occupied territories and the evident impossibility for them to leave those facilities alone and travel back to Ukraine.

104. According to the Ukrainian authorities, Russian authorities refused the return of children who were given up for adoption. Notably, the placement of Ukrainian children in Russian adoption databases compounded by their fast-tracked integration into Russian nationality significantly hampered identification and tracking in view of the secrecy of the process. The practice of long-term placement in family settings and institutions endured – such arrangements have been reported in 21 regions in the Russian Federation and occupied territories, exemplifying persistent lack of co-operation by the Russian Federation. This has hampered progress in establishing an international and independent mechanism to facilitate identification, restoration of contacts and safe reunifications that uphold the best interest of the child and international law. In Ukraine, while discussions on such a mechanism are ongoing, a single approach remains to be agreed.

105. The Ukrainian Government also continued to strengthen the legal and policy framework by introducing mandatory immediate financial assistance for child returnees as well as developing guidelines for working with them. In view of the magnitude of the needs, stepping up expertise, methodology, advocacy and financial support has remained an urgent imperative.

106. As regards accountability efforts, the investigation launched by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in connection with the alleged war crime of transfer of children of Ukraine by the Russian Federation remains ongoing.⁶¹

107. More broadly, the Council of Europe Secretariat's interlocutors underlined the profound and lasting impact of the protracted conflict on Ukrainian children and young people noting that it had generated a deep and enduring sense of loss – one that risks defining an entire generation.

108. The International Coalition for the return of Ukrainian children, led by Ukraine and Canada has remained a key international platform for co-ordinating international efforts to address the plight of Ukrainian children. The Council of Europe acceded to the Coalition in 2025. Furthermore, under the Council of Europe auspices, the Special Envoy on the situation of children of Ukraine has remained actively engaged in international efforts by promoting accountability for their safe return, reunification with their families, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration. The Council of Europe's Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine has continued to function as a multilateral co-operation platform enabling member states, including Ukraine, to respond rapidly to urgent legal and political challenges concerning children affected by the war, regardless of whether they have fled to Council of Europe member states, remained in Ukraine, or returned following unlawful deportation to the Russian Federation, Belarus and temporarily occupied territories. At the parliamentary level, the activities of the Parliamentary Network on the Situation of Children of Ukraine under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have been complementary to these efforts.

⁶¹ Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, Press release, 17 March 2023.

VII ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

109. Consistent with previous reports, the Russian authorities failed to investigate human rights abuses, including by persistently refusing to co-operate with mandated international mechanisms, highlighting the challenges of establishing accountability.

110. In Ukraine, the PGO is leading national efforts to ensure accountability through investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. As of March 2026, the PGO had registered around 240 000 criminal cases. Indictments had been issued in 1 132 cases, out of which court verdicts had been issued in 870 cases. In 245 cases proceedings were held *in absentia*.

111. Ukraine's legal framework remains to be aligned with the Rome Statute, ratified in 2024. A draft law on harmonisation of the Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes with the Rome Statute has been prepared by an inter-agency working group. A key change consists in detailing the types of war crimes under Article 438 of the CC (violations of laws and customs of war) which serves as the primary basis for prosecuting war crimes, whereas its current iteration renders difficult its application in practice. Further steps have been taken to ensure a victim-oriented approach which remains crucial to the effectiveness of investigations, including through consideration of guidelines on the investigation of CRSV.

112. The staggering caseload of war-related criminal proceedings placed significant strain on national investigation capacities. The PGO has emphasised the necessity of changing investigative approaches by focusing on the high and mid-levels of responsibility, as well as enhancing analytical capacities for war crime investigations. The PGO also participates in various bilateral and European investigative initiatives.

113. Reportedly, as of 17 February 2026, the PGO had registered 24 365 cases concerning crimes against national security, the majority (10 777) for collaborative activities. In 2025 alone, courts convicted 1 115 individuals for collaborative activities.⁶² The application of the Criminal Code provisions (Article 111-1) continued to give rise to human rights concerns in certain cases, particularly when the coercive circumstances of occupation, but also the individual circumstances of the individuals did not appear to have been sufficiently taken into account. The PGO has emphasised the need to comply with IHRL and IHL norms in the criminal proceedings through an approach that determines individual responsibility and applies the necessary safeguards. To this effect, it has elaborated a set of methodological recommendations and guidelines with the help of international partners.

⁶² International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine 2026, op. cit.

114. During the period under review, further steps were taken towards establishing an international accountability framework. On 25 June 2025, the President of Ukraine and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe signed a Bilateral Agreement establishing the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine within the Council of Europe framework. An Advance Team started working in January 2026 with a view to laying the legal and operational groundwork. On 16 December 2025, the Council of Europe and the Netherlands hosted a Diplomatic Conference marking the opening for signature of the Open Convention establishing an International Claims Commission to succeed the Register of Damage for Ukraine. The Claims Commission will be mandated to decide claims and determine any amount of compensation due in each case for damage, loss, or injury caused by internationally wrongful acts committed by the Russian Federation in or against Ukraine on or after 24 February 2022. The Claims Commission will be an independent body within the institutional framework of the Council of Europe. 34 States and the European Union formally signed the Convention immediately after it was opened for signature and the ratification process is ongoing.

115. According to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, no less than 20 countries have launched proceedings into international crimes committed by Russian forces on the territory of Ukraine since the start of the full-scale military invasion relying on the international principle of universal jurisdiction. The Commissioner has commended the use of this principle noting universal jurisdiction can have an important impact if well-targeted and will remain a long-term option since international crimes have no statute of limitation.⁶³

VIII CONCLUDING REMARKS

116. Alongside ongoing armed hostilities in the context of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, the deterioration of the human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation persisted during the period under review. The occupation has further entrenched patterns of grave, systemic and far-reaching human rights abuses that are fundamentally incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, causing profound harm and trauma to individuals and communities.

117. Notwithstanding numerous violations documented by international and local human rights organisations, lack of physical access for international organisations to the temporarily occupied territories and the continued refusal of co-operation by Russian occupying authorities have impeded independent monitoring, fact verification, tracing and direct contact with victims, including children. The real scale of documented violations, therefore, remains increasingly difficult to assess.

⁶³ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Report of High-Level Meeting On Human Rights and the Pathway to Peace in Ukraine, Strasbourg, 11 December 2025.

118. In this context, it remains imperative for the Council of Europe and its institutions to continue to contribute to the monitoring of human rights in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, to expand assistance to the Ukrainian authorities in establishing relevant and legal and institutional frameworks and to advance accountability. The Council of Europe's contribution to the protection of human rights of the affected population, to the extent that circumstances allow, should be both tailored and supportive to broader efforts laying the groundwork of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, including in the context of any future peace arrangements. A credible peace process must effectively address *inter alia* the release of civilian detainees and prisoners of war, the return of Ukrainian children, Russia's accountability for the crimes committed during the war of aggression, as well as the human rights of Ukrainians in the temporarily occupied territories.