UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

TREATMENT OF CIVILIANS DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ARMED ATTACK BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AGAINST UKRAINE

23 September 2025

"We will leave you to rot. No one will find you. No one needs you. You don't exist. We'll bury you right here; only hungry dogs will find you."

– a man civilian detainee describing threats in detention in occupied territory of Ukraine. He lost consciousness several times due to beatings during interrogations.

Cover illustrator: Lindsey Dolan

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Large-scale deprivation of liberty, affecting both of civilians and military personnel, remains a stark reality in the ongoing armed attack of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Building on previous OHCHR findings, this report describes the treatment of civilians deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the armed conflict since 2022.

2. The Russian Federation and Ukraine have detained distinct groups of civilians for different reasons and lengths of time. Notwithstanding those differences, international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) prescribe common minimum standards for the fair and humane treatment of detainees. Civilians can only be detained on grounds lawful under international law and must be released from detention as soon as the lawful grounds for their detention cease to exist.

3. The Russian Federation has detained Ukrainian citizens on occupied territory where it is bound by its obligations as an occupying Power under IHL, complemented by concurrently applicable IHRL. This report establishes that the Russian Federation has subjected Ukrainian civilian detainees to serious violations of IHL and IHRL. In particular:

    i. The Russian Federation applies Russian criminal law in occupied territory of Ukraine, ignoring the obligation under IHL to respect – unless absolutely prevented – the laws in force in the occupied territory. It did not develop a procedure for the internment of civilians as foreseen by IHL.

    ii. Torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (torture and ill-treatment), including sexual violence, have been applied in a systematic and widespread manner against civilians in places of detention.

    iii. Frequent violations of applicable legal conditions and procedural safeguards governing deprivation of liberty have resulted in arbitrary detention, and in a significant number of cases appear to have given rise to enforced disappearances.

    iv. The cumulative effect of these measures, combined with a lack of accountability, has placed many Ukrainian civilians outside the effective protection of the law during their detention.

    v. High numbers of Ukrainian civilian detainees remain arbitrarily detained by Russian authorities in occupied territory of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for reasons or actions related to the armed conflict, often held in dire conditions, without the possibility of relief.

4. In territory under its control, Ukraine has detained mainly its own citizens on charges related to national security under the framework of domestic criminal law, where it is bound by IHRL. Since the full-scale armed attack by the Russian Federation, the increased number of conflict-related detainees has placed additional burdens on the criminal justice system of Ukraine. While authorities have taken steps to ensure procedural safeguards and improve detention conditions, concerns remain. OHCHR continued to document instances of torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees by Ukrainian authorities, and accountability remained limited.

5. The accession process of Ukraine to the European Union offers an opportunity to analyze comprehensively the risk factors in the penitentiary system for torture and ill-treatment and strengthen safeguards and accountability in line with a human rights-based approach. The Ukrainian Government must also ensure respect for the rights of all individuals who are transferred to the Russian Federation as part of diplomatic efforts to secure the release of Ukrainian citizens from Russian detention, in particular in relation to free and informed consent and non-refoulement.

II. INTRODUCTION

6. This report describes the treatment of civilians deprived of their liberty by the Russian Federation and Ukraine in relation to the armed conflict since February 2022. The Russian Federation and Ukraine have detained distinct groups of civilians; different legal frameworks apply for each group. The report focuses on core rules flowing from both IHL and IHRL aimed at the humane and fair treatment of civilians deprived of their liberty during conflict.[1]

III. METHODOLOGY

7. In June 2023, OHCHR published a report on the detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, covering the period from February 2022 to May 2023.[2] Building on those findings, the current report provides an in-depth analysis of information collected between 1 June 2023 and 10 September 2025.

8. The findings of this report are primarily based on confidential interviews with civilians deprived of their liberty, using standard "open questions" interviewing techniques. In making these findings, OHCHR has relied on accounts that were detailed and internally consistent, as well as its own observations, including of the interviewee's physical conditions.

9. In addition, the report draws from interviews with witnesses of human rights violations, relatives and lawyers of victims, Ukrainian Government officials, members of civil society and other interlocutors. OHCHR also examined court documents, official records and correspondence, photos, videos and other relevant material, including from open sources.

10. Findings are included in the report where they meet the "reasonable grounds to believe" standard: that is, where, based on a body of verified information, an ordinary prudent observer would have reasonable grounds to believe that the facts took place as described and, where legal conclusions are drawn, that these facts meet all the elements of a violation. Where the report describes patterns of conduct, these are based on the common elements established by consistent, credible sources.

11. Information in this report is used with the informed consent of sources. At all stages, OHCHR strictly adhered to the "do no harm" principle and took all appropriate measures to prevent re-traumatization and protect individuals.

12. Prior to publication, OHCHR shared the draft report with the concerned States for factual comments, as per standard practice. Comments have been incorporated as appropriate.

IV. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

13. The Fourth Geneva Convention, supplemented by Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions,[3] sets forth criteria and procedures governing the detention of civilians during international armed conflict. Most provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention apply to civilians who are "protected persons".[4] They are defined as persons who "find themselves, in the case of a conflict or occupation, in the hands of a Party to the conflict or Occupying Power of which they are not nationals".[5]

[1] Violations related to the right to a fair trial are addressed in separate OHCHR reports referenced herein.
[2] OHCHR, "Detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, 24 February 2022 – 23 May 2023".
[3] In particular, art. 75.
[4] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 4. Part II of the Fourth Geneva Convention has wider application.
[5] Protected persons may in no circumstances renounce the protections due to them under the Convention; thus, Ukrainian civilians in occupied territory retain their protected status regardless of whether they acquire Russian citizenship (Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 8).

14. IHRL applies concurrently to all categories of civilians deprived of their liberty.[6] Both IHL and IHRL are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Prohibitions of torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance

15. Torture and ill-treatment,[7] arbitrary detention,[8] as well as enforced disappearances[9] are unequivocally prohibited. International law also requires respect for the life and well-being.[10]

Legal conditions and procedural safeguards governing deprivation of liberty

16. A number of legal conditions and procedural safeguards apply in cases of deprivation of liberty of civilians in the context of armed conflict under IHL and IHRL. These include providing individuals with information about the grounds of deprivation of liberty,[11] regular review and the possibility to challenge decisions,[12] communication with the outside world,[13] provision of information to families on the whereabouts and fate of loved ones,[14] medical check-ups[15] and access to independent monitors.[16]

17. In cases involving internment or pre-trial detention, the decision to deprive a person of liberty should be applied as a measure of last resort; the decision must be made on an individual basis.[17] The use of unofficial places of detention often places detainees outside of the effective protection of the law.[18]

18. In addition, under IHL, deportation of protected persons, including detainees, from occupied territory is prohibited, regardless of motive.[19]

Responsibility under international law

19. Responsibility for the treatment of detainees lies with the detaining authorities, irrespective of individual responsibility that may exist, and engages the responsibility of the State of which they are an organ or to

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[6] The Russian Federation and Ukraine are parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ukraine has also ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED).

[7] Fourth Geneva Convention, arts 27, 32, 33; ICCPR, arts 4 and 7; Convention against Torture, arts 1 and 2(2), ICRC customary IHL, rules 90, 93

[8] See ICCPR, art. 9, and ICRC customary IHL, rule 99. Internment that complies with IHL and applicable IHRL is in principle not arbitrary, Human Rights Committee, General Comment no. 35 (General Comment 35), paras. 64-66.

[9] The prohibition of enforced disappearances is considered customary IHL and IHRL; see ICRC customary IHL, rule 98, and Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, A/HRC/51/31/Add.3, para. 72; Declaration on the Protection of All Perssons from Enforced Disappearances, A/RES/47/133 (1992). General Comment 35, para. 17

[10] ICCPR, arts. 6, 7 and 10; Convention against Torture, art. 16; Fourth Geneva Convention, arts 27, 32 and 37; Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 75.

[11] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 71; ICCPR, art. 9.

[12] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 78; ICCPR, art. 9(3) and (4).

[13] Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 107 and 116. These rights can be restricted in line with the Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 5.

[14] Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, art. 10(2); ICPPED, art. 18; Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 106; Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, art. 16; UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules), arts. 68 – 69. The Fourth Geneva Convention requires that "[u]pon the outbreak of a conflict and in all cases of occupation, each of the Parties to the conflict shall establish an official Information Bureau responsible for receiving and transmitting information in respect of the protected persons who are in its power" (art. 136, 138).

[15] Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 76, 81, 91 and 92; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 12, Madela Rules, art. 30; Body of Principles, arts. 24, 26; UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders, arts. 6 et seq; General Comment 35, para. 58.

[16] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 143; Mandela Rules, arts. 83 to 85; General Comment 35, paras. 58 and 64.

[17] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 78; ICCPR, art. 9.3. See also General Comment 35, para. 38.

[18] ICCPR, art. 9(1).

[19] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 49(1); ICRC Customary IHL, rule 129. The occupying Power may temporarily evacuate protected persons from an area if required for the security of the population or imperative military reasons, however the population must not be displaced out of occupied territory unless impossible to avoid for material reasons.

whom their conduct is otherwise attributable.[20] States are obliged to take all necessary measures to ensure the rights of persons deprived of their liberty set out under IHL and IHRL are respected. States have the obligation to investigate gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law and bring perpetrators to account.[21] Victims of violations of international human rights or humanitarian law have the right to effective access to justice and to effective remedies.[22]

20. Wilful killings, torture and ill-treatment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, unlawful confinement, unlawful deportation and transfer, among other acts, committed against protected persons constitute war crimes, triggering individual criminal responsibility.[23] States must investigate war crimes allegedly committed by their nationals or armed forces, or on their territory, and, if appropriate, prosecute the suspects.[24] States parties also have an obligation to search for perpetrators and prosecute or extradite them regardless of their nationality.[25] If committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy, such acts may also amount to crimes against humanity.[26] This report focuses on State responsibility from failures to respect, protect or guarantee the rights set out under IHL and IHRL.

V. CIVILIAN DETAINEES HELD BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

"When I broke my knee, I asked for help. 'Really?' the guard replied and kicked me with his leg in the swollen knee"

– a woman civilian detainee shared her experience requesting medical aid in a Russian place of detention. She did not receive medical treatment.

A. Civilian detainees

21. In this section, the term "civilian detainees" encompasses Ukrainian civilians arrested, detained or interned by the Russian Federation in occupied territory of Ukraine as well as those deported to the Russian Federation. This group falls under the category of "protected persons" of the Fourth Geneva Convention.[27] This report focuses on civilians who were deprived of their liberty for actions or other reasons related to the armed conflict.

22. It is not known how many Ukrainian civilians the Russian Federation has detained in the context of its full-scale armed attack against Ukraine. In May 2025, the Ukrainian Ombudsperson reported that Ukrainian authorities had confirmed the ongoing detention of around 1,800 Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation for reasons related to the armed conflict. The actual number is likely significantly higher due to the difficulty in verifying information.[28] The Office of the Prosecutor General reported that they identified

[20] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 29; ICCPR, art. 2(1); Convention against Torture, art. 2, Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, art. 4.
[21] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 131; ICCPR, art. 2(3); Convention against Torture, arts. 12 and 13.
[22] ICCPR, art. 2(3), 9(5); Convention against Torture, art. 13-14; Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, art. 3.
[23] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 147; ICRC Study on Customary IHL, Rule 156; Rome Statute, art. 8; The Russian Federation is not a party to the Rome Statute. After having submitted two declarations to the International Criminal Court (ICC), art. 12(3) of the Rome Statute, Ukraine ratified the Rome Statue in August 2024, albeit with a declaration excluding the Court's jurisdiction over war crimes allegedly carried out by Ukrainian nationals for a period of seven years from the Statute's entry into force.
[24] ICRC Study on Customary IHL, Rule 158.
[25] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 146; Convention against Torture, art. 5.
[26] Rome Statute, art. 7.
[27] Article 4.
[28] See https://t.me/dmytro_lubinetzs/8718 (last accessed 10 September 2025).

15,250 civilians who were and continue to be detained by Russian authorities between February 2022 and August 2025 based on their analysis in criminal proceedings.

B. Legal basis of deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilian detainees (as protected persons) in occupied territory of Ukraine

23. IHL permits the deprivation of liberty of civilians in occupied territory subject to certain conditions. Relevant provisions of IHL are complemented by and interpreted in light of IHRL. The internment of captured military personnel is regulated in the Third Geneva Convention and is analytically distinct from detention of civilians.

Internment

24. As an exceptional measure during armed conflict, States may intern (i.e., take into security or administrative detention) persons believed to be a threat to State security. The Fourth Geneva Convention allows for internment of protected persons in occupied territory, if the occupying Power considers it necessary for imperative reasons of security. It requires, however, that the occupying Power establish a regular procedure for making decisions regarding internment in a manner that upholds safeguards, including the right to challenge the lawfulness of internment decisions and to have them periodically reviewed by a competent body.[29]

25. OHCHR is not aware that such a procedure has been established and applied by the Russian Federation in occupied territory of Ukraine.

Detention in criminal cases

26. The Fourth Geneva Convention also sets out rules relating to penal legislation, procedure and treatment of detainees in criminal cases in occupied territory. As a general rule, the laws in force in the occupied territory, including the penal laws of the occupied territory and its regular court system, shall remain in force. The occupying Power may however repeal or suspend those laws in cases where they constitute a threat to its security or an obstacle to the application of IHL. It may promulgate new penal provisions only for certain purposes and establish military courts to sit in occupied territory in case of breach of such provisions.[30]

27. The Russian Federation purported to annex the occupied areas of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions in September 2022, following its earlier illegal annexation of Crimea[31] in 2014, and imposed its own judicial and legal system on the occupied territory of Ukraine, in violation of international law.[32] The application of Russian criminal law also means that protected persons in occupied territory—largely Ukrainian citizens—face prosecution for offenses under Russian law like "treason", for alleged betrayal of the Russian Federation, and "discrediting of the Russian armed forces", for criticizing armed forces that had invaded their country, for instance.

[29] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 78. The periodic review should take place every six months if possible.
[30] Fourth Geneva Convention, arts. 64, 66; Hague Regulations, art. 43. According to the ICRC Commentary to article 64 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, those exceptions are limited in nature. The occupation authorities cannot abrogate or suspend the penal laws merely to make it accord with their own legal conceptions.
[31] "Crimea" refers to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and City of Sevastopol.
[32] See footnote 30 above. On 13 October 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution ES-11/4 on "Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations", which condemned the organization of the "referenda" and the attempted unlawful annexation of oblasts of Ukraine. See also Ukraine and Netherlands v. Russian Federation, European Court of Human Rights, 9 July 2025, paras. 607-609.

C. Key findings on the treatment of civilian detainees

> *"The pain caused by electric shocks and beatings was so severe that I could not even cry – I could only scream, and I did not recognize my own voice"*
>
> *– a Ukrainian civilian woman describing her treatment in detention.*

28. For the analysis of this report, OHCHR has documented details on 508 cases of civilian detainees (392 men, 103 women, 3 girls and 9 boys). Those cases included individuals of all age groups, from adolescents to older persons, and 15 persons with disabilities. In 216 of those cases, OHCHR confidentially interviewed the detainees (152 men, 63 women and 1 boy) after they were released from captivity and provided first-hand accounts of their experience.[33]

29. Longer-term detainees were often held in multiple locations, which enabled OHCHR to record and analyse information on the treatment and conditions in multiple places of detention. Interviews with prisoners of war (POWs) who were held together with Ukrainian civilian detainees provided witness accounts on conditions and treatment also experienced by civilians in places of detention. Interviews with family members and lawyers allowed OHCHR to gather details on notifications and communication with detained relatives.

30. Documenting the treatment of civilian detainees held by the Russian Federation is particularly challenging because OHCHR has access to civilian detainees only after they have been released and reached places where they can be interviewed safely. The Russian Federation has not granted OHCHR access for independent monitoring in occupied territory despite repeated requests. Also, many people living in occupied territory are hesitant to share accounts via telephone or messaging services out of concern that conversations may be overheard or intercepted.

Patterns of arrests and detention

31. In the initial months following the full-scale armed attack against Ukraine in February 2022, Russian authorities detained large numbers of civilians in territory that fell under their control for alleged support to Ukrainian armed forces. Previous findings by OHCHR showed that Russian authorities conducted a campaign of arrests and detention to establish control over the population in the aftermath of the full-scale armed attack in 2022, mirroring a pattern observed during the occupation of Crimea in 2014.[34]

32. Persons often targeted first for detention were veterans of the Ukrainian armed forces[35] and those suspected of links to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). Accounts indicated that Russian authorities had obtained or compiled lists of such persons whom they apprehended, detained and interrogated. Russian authorities also detained family members of such persons to pressure them to surrender. Over time, Russian authorities detained broader categories of civilians whom they perceived as opposing the occupation, including journalists, media workers, civil servants, workers of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, public officials, education-related staff, volunteers helping civilians amid the hostilities, and individuals expressing pro-Ukrainian views.[36]

[33] This includes persons who were arrested in Crimea or self-proclaimed 'Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics' before February 2022 but remained in detention after the full-scale armed attack.
[34] See OHCHR, "Human rights situation during the Russian occupation of territory of Ukraine and its aftermath (24 February 2022 – 31 December 2023)", paras. 36 et seq.; OHCHR, "Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation: Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine (28 February 2024)", paras. 23 et seq.
[35] This includes members of the Anti-terrorist Operation and Joint Forces Operation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions from 2014 to 2022.
[36] For details, see OHCHR, Detention of civilians report; and "Russian occupation of territory of Ukraine and its aftermath".

33. After the initial spike in 2022, arrests and detention of individuals for suspected support of the Ukrainian armed forces, or perceived opposition to the occupation, continued. Many of those individuals arrested during the initial months of occupation also remained in detention after 2023, with some facing criminal trials or having received long sentences of more than 10 years of imprisonment.

Examples of categories of long-term civilian detainees who remain in detention after June 2025*

Three national staff members of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, who were arrested in 2022 and subsequently sentenced for "high treason" and "espionage" respectively. Members of international organizations enjoy immunity in relation to the exercise of their official functions.

And at least:

- 15 workers of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.
- 37 journalists and media workers, some of whom were also active human rights defenders.[37]
- 3 local administration staff, including the mayor of Kherson.
- 68 members of various religious or ethnic groups, including evangelical Christian communities across occupied territory of Ukraine and Muslims, mainly Crimean Tatars, accused of affiliation with "Hizb ut-Tahrir" in Crimea.[38]

* The information in this box is indicative rather than comprehensive.

Treatment and conditions of detention

> *"Physically, I was much bigger back then. I have lost a lot of weight. They beat me with rifle butts, kicks, punches. They stepped on my face with their feet. They said: 'He is too big, does not feel the pain if we just beat him. Let us use electricity. First fingers, and then we will burn his prostate'"*
>
> *– a Ukrainian civilian man describing the treatment during his initial interrogation while detained in occupied territory of Ukraine.*

34. OHCHR findings show that Russian authorities have subjected Ukrainian civilian detainees to torture and ill-treatment, including inhumane conditions of detention, in a widespread and systematic manner.[39]

35. More than 92 per cent of the total of 216 released civilian detainees interviewed since June 2023 gave consistent and detailed accounts of having been subjected to torture or ill-treatment during their captivity. Both men and women were affected (144 men, 1 boy and 54 women). One hundred one interviewees also described witnessing torture or ill-treatment of other detainees.

[37] "Human rights defender" is a term used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights in a peaceful manner; see Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, A/RES/53/144.

[38] In the Russian Federation, Jehovah's Witnesses are under a blanket prohibition as an "extremist organization" and "Hizb ut-Tahrir" as "terrorist organization".

[39] The UN Committee against Torture "considers that torture is practised systematically when it is apparent that the torture cases reported have not occurred fortuitously in a particular place or at a particular time, but are seen to be habitual, widespread and deliberate in at least a considerable part of the territory of the country in question. [...] Inadequate legislation which in practice allows room for the use of torture may also add to the systematic nature of this practice", UN General Assembly "Report: Addendum, Summary Account of the Results of the Proceedings Concerning the Inquiry on Turkey" (15 November 1993), A/48/44/Add.1, para. 39.

36. While most individuals interviewed confirmed the pattern of torture and ill-treatment that occurred in 2022,[40] they also described a continuation of this pattern in 2023 and beyond. Out of 88 released detainees who were apprehended or remained in detention after June 2023, 79 reported violations that occurred from 2023 to 2025. In addition, 66 released Ukrainian POWs described that they witnessed torture and ill-treatment of civilians who were held together with them in the same facilities in 2024 and 2025. Family members and lawyers also received worrying reports about the treatment of their loved ones and clients in Russian captivity.

Main methods

> *"They beat me so heavily with a baseball bat, targeting my legs, knee and head. They damaged my elbow, displaced my kneecap, injured my feet. I told one of them – be a human being and shoot me dead. He replied that he would not waste ammo to kill me. Then I asked him to strike me at my head with a bat and end my suffering. After that he hit me in my face and broke my teeth"*
>
> *– a man civilian detainee describing treatment in captivity by Russian soldiers.*

37. Released detainees described being subjected to a wide range of methods of torture or ill-treatment. Recurrent methods included: severe beatings with a variety of instruments, such as batons and sticks, electric shocks to various body parts, mock executions, kicks, threats of death and violence to a detainee or their loved ones, a variety of stress positions, such as "bent walking" and prolonged kneeling on cement, and different forms of humiliation, including forced singing of the Russian anthem and patriotic songs. Many interviewees were subjected to multiple forms of torture or ill-treatment while in detention.
38. Interviewees also reported being subjected to torture or ill-treatment including forms of sexual violence during detention. Forty-nine men, 25 women and one boy said that they had suffered acts of sexual violence, including rape, electric shocks to genitalia or breast/nipples, beating while naked, forced nudity, threats of sexual violence and sexualized humiliation.
39. OHCHR concluded that these acts of violence were generally conducted with an intention deliberately to inflict severe pain and suffering upon victims.

Context and circumstances of torture and ill-treatment

40. Accounts indicated that torture or ill-treatment of civilian detainees by Russian authorities occurred during interrogations and at various stages of captivity, including arrest and transfer.
41. Torture and ill-treatment were applied most frequently during interrogations. One hundred forty of those interviewees who stated that they were subjected to torture or ill-treatment described it happening during questioning by Russian authorities. Interrogations were typically aimed at eliciting confessions and information about others or at exerting pressure to sign documents or to agree to collaborate with the occupying authorities. For example, in one case, a civilian man was arrested by Russian authorities in August 2024 in Zaporizhzhia region and subjected to electric shocks during interrogation, with wires connected to his nipples and genitals.
42. Ninety-nine interviewees also experienced so-called "welcome beatings" upon arrival at detention facilities and/or acts of torture and ill-treatment during regular routines. While "welcome beatings" were most common upon arrival in official facilities, incidents during regular routines happened both in official and unofficial facilities in occupied territory and the Russian Federation. For example, a man described that upon arriving at a transit facility in the Russian Federation in June 2024, the whole group of detainees was forced to crawl and later kneel on asphalt for prolonged periods of time. They were beaten, including

[40] See for instance OHCHR, Detention of civilians report.

with sticks, and kicked at the same time. In another case, a man described being subjected to beatings on a weekly basis in a pre-trial facility in Kherson region where he was held from June 2023 to February 2024.

Conditions of detention

43. In addition, interviewees frequently described suffering from dire conditions of detention during their captivity. OHCHR has identified 115 locations where the conditions appeared to be inhuman and degrading. Some of those instances of such conditions of detention may also amount to torture.

44. Released civilian detainees recounted that they experienced a lack of food or did not receive food of sufficient nutritious quality in at least 87 places. For example, a civilian detainee described that her diet in a pre-trial facility in the Russian Federation, where she was kept for a year from mid-2023 to mid-2024, mainly consisted of porridge and pieces of bread. When they received other food, such as fish, it was often spoiled. In 2024, the food quality and quantity improved slightly. She lost 20 kilos of body weight in detention.

45. Interviewees described medical treatment as poor. Even if doctors were present in official facilities, detainees often did not receive adequate treatment or medication. For example, a man serving a 16-year sentence in Crimea has been detained in conditions that negatively affect his health. He reported experiencing hallucinations and being unable to eat or sleep properly due to the persistent smell from the sewage system. Despite repeated complaints he submitted requesting improvements to detention conditions and access to medical assistance, the prison administration took no action. His health has continued to deteriorate.

46. Detainees further described that places of detention had unsanitary conditions, lack of hygiene, including dental hygiene, lack of beds, hot or cold conditions, lack of outdoor time, overcrowding and restrictions to use the bathroom. For example, a woman who was held in a pre-trial facility in occupied territory from October 2023 to September 2024 described being held in a small and wet cell infested with cockroaches, rats coming out of the sewage system and a broken window impossible to close. She was allowed to walk outside three times during this period. Some women detainees also reported that they were not provided with sanitary hygiene products while in detention, or that their menstrual cycles had ceased within a few months of detention, a physiological response consistent with severe and prolonged stress and/or low body weight.

Places of detention

47. Based on the interviews with released Ukrainian civilian detainees, POWs and other sources, OHCHR geolocated 161 official places used by Russian authorities to detain Ukrainian civilians. The official facilities included pre-trial facilities, penal colonies, places of temporary detention (often police custody) and tent camps. In at least 55 of those places, POWs were held together with civilian detainees, including in the same cells.

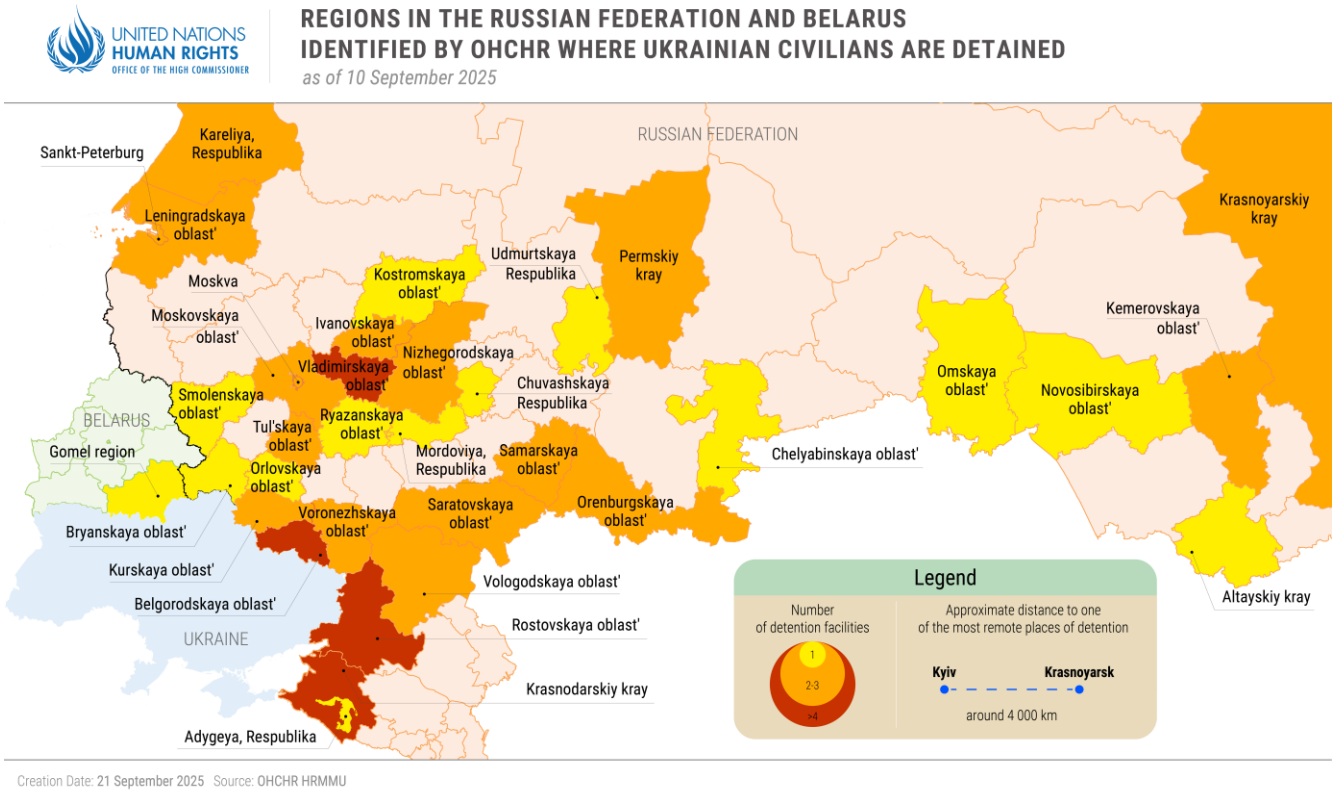
48. Civilians were also frequently held in unofficial places of detention, including private houses, basements, garages and former administration or office buildings. OHCHR recorded information about 42 such unofficial places.

49. Despite the prohibition under IHL against deporting protected persons from occupied territory,[41] Ukrainian civilians were so deported and detained in 73 places of detention in the Russian Federation. Deportations of civilian detainees continued into 2025. Recently released Ukrainian POWs reported that both POWs and civilian detainees were transported in large groups from the occupied territory of Ukraine to detention facilities in the Russian Federation up to several thousand kilometres away, starting from late 2024.

50. Patterns of torture and ill-treatment described above occurred in different types of facilities across all occupied regions of Ukraine and at least 28 regions in the Russian Federation. OHCHR documented

[41] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 49.

torture or ill-treatment in at least 114 official places of detention located in occupied territory of Ukraine and the Russian Federation.[42]



Responsible authorities

51. Detainees who had been tortured or ill-treated identified different State entities as having been involved. The entities identified most frequently were the armed forces of the Russian Federation, Federal Security Service (FSB), staff of the Russian Federal Penitentiary Services, National Guard of the Russian Federation (Rosgvardia) and police of the Russian Federation. Interviewees reported that Ukrainian "collaborators" worked with those entities.

52. Interviewees reported that the FSB played a central role in arresting, detaining and interrogating civilian detainees in occupied territory of Ukraine, often working in close cooperation with other actors listed above. The widespread use of torture and ill-treatment, and cooperation between entities, make it highly unlikely that these acts occurred randomly or incidentally.

53. In some cases, authorities took measures to conceal their identities. Interviewees consistently described that officials did not identify themselves, including during arrests and interrogations. Civilians were typically blindfolded after arrest and during transfer. In 69 cases, interviewees reported that they did not know where they were detained, including in apparently official facilities. Guards in some facilities wore balaclavas.

Extrajudicial executions and deaths in custody

54. Since February 2022, OHCHR has documented the extrajudicial execution of 90 Ukrainian civilians (83 men, 6 women and 1 girl) in official and unofficial places of detention in occupied territory of Ukraine and the Russian Federation. A further 38 civilians (29 men and 9 women) died in custody as a result of torture or ill-treatment, poor conditions of internment, or inadequate medical attention. Fifteen deaths in custody, including four extrajudicial executions, occurred since June 2023.

[42] OHCHR was not able to collect detailed information on the treatment and conditions in every facility identified in para. 47 above.

55. In February 2025, the body of Viktoriia Roshchyna, a Ukrainian journalist who went missing in August 2023 from occupied territory, was returned to Ukraine. Russian officials had informed the family in October 2024 that she had died in custody. The Ukrainian authorities have reported that her body bore signs of torture. In February 2025, a Crimean Tatar man died in detention after his illegal deportation to the Russian Federation. He had been sentenced to eight years of imprisonment for participation in an organization designated as "terrorist". Prior to his death, he told his family that he had been subjected to beatings in detention and had developed diabetes and pulmonary oedema. In October 2024, two Russian soldiers detained two Ukrainian civilian men in a private house in Kharkiv region. The following morning, the soldiers executed both men on the order of their Russian commander.

Impacts of torture and ill-treatment

56. Sixty-two interviewees described long-term health impacts resulting from treatment or conditions of their detention. Interviewees frequently suffered from dental problems, such as teeth falling out, which they attributed to malnutrition, general stress or beatings to the face. Others described suffering from body pain, constant headaches, problems with sleep, anxiety or panic attacks, incorrectly healed bone fractures, mutilations, untreated infections, reduced eyesight and hair loss or had developed tics resulting from the treatment and conditions experienced in detention.

57. Several women and men further reported gender-specific impacts of torture and ill-treatment. For example, one man described health issues related to his urinary tract due to electric shocks to the genitalia. Two pregnant women suffered a miscarriage following physical violence.

Key procedural safeguards and legal conditions

> *"I am 70 years old. I was detained for more than three years, without a charge, without a trial."*
>
> *– older civilian man about his detention in occupied territory and in the Russian Federation. He was beaten and attacked by a dog during detention.*

58. Civilian detainees also faced a pattern of violations of basic legal conditions and procedural safeguards.

Grounds for detention and procedural safeguards

59. The Russian Federation detained Ukrainian civilians in relation to the armed conflict on a variety of grounds and asserting different legal bases.

60. In some cases, particularly in the wave of detentions in the months after the full-scale armed attack, people were detained without formal charges. The accounts of at least 112 interviewees suggest that they were detained, and later released, without any apparent official proceedings. In 50 of those cases, the interviewees were detained for periods longer than two weeks. They were typically not informed of the grounds for their detention, nor did they have the possibility to challenge the lawfulness of their detention or have it reviewed regularly.

61. OHCHR documented cases in which detention was manifestly arbitrary, such as detention of family members of persons of interest without any accusation of wrongdoing or indication of security concerns related to themselves. In one case in June 2023, in Zaporizhzhia region, Russian authorities detained five family members and friends of a man for several days and questioned them about his whereabouts. At least two of them were subjected to beatings and electric shocks during the interrogation. The man was eventually apprehended and remained in detention as of August 2025.

62. In other cases, administrative charges were brought against detainees, but information suggests that these charges often did not correspond to the underlying reasons for detention. For example, a woman in

Zaporizhzhia region reported that in February 2024 she was held in an unofficial place of detention for a day, where she was interrogated by FSB in relation to alleged membership of a "pro-Ukrainian group" and threatened with electric shocks. The next day, she was taken to a local court and placed under 20-day administrative detention for ostensible curfew violations. At the end of the 20-day period, the FSB interrogated her again about the same group in an unidentified building and subsequently handed her over to the Russian police during curfew hours, which resulted in her being detained for 25 more days for alleged curfew violations.

63. In yet other cases, the Russian Federation detained Ukrainian civilians for alleged violations of Russian criminal law. Some have been detained on charges related to national security (e.g. for espionage, treason, extremism or terrorism), which carry lengthy prison sentences.[43] Others have been detained for acts that appear to involve the legitimate exercise of freedoms of expression or association, particularly for criticizing the Russian armed forces or expressing aspects of Ukrainian identity, such as posting pictures containing Ukrainian national symbols or colours on social media. For example, in 2023, a man in Crimea was criminally convicted and sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment in a colony for "public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation" for "ridiculing modern equipment used by the Russian armed forces".

64. In addition, the Russian Federation incorrectly classified and detained some civilians under an asserted "POW status".[44] This practice does not afford the individual the procedural safeguards guaranteed by the Fourth Geneva Convention, such as to challenge the fact of their detention.[45] It also exposes them to a heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment given the documented patterns on the treatment of Ukrainian POWs held by the Russian Federation. Some interviewees reported that throughout their detention, they were not aware of whether the Russian Federation had categorized them as a POW or civilian. In one case, Russian soldiers detained a former member of the Ukrainian armed forces[46] in Kharkiv region in September 2022. He was subsequently deported to a detention facility in the Russian Federation where he was told that he was held under asserted "POW status"'. After about nine months, he was prosecuted for "obstructing the special military operation" and transferred to another detention facility in central Russian Federation. Only once his status was changed to that of criminal defendant did the man receive access to a lawyer and limited communication with the outside world. Despite active search efforts, his mother had been unaware of his whereabouts and fate prior to that time. The man is serving a sentence of 11 years of imprisonment in the Russian Federation as of July 2025.

65. Other key safeguards applicable to detention under IHRL and IHL were also not respected. Men and women regularly described that they were held together in the same place of detention, including in close proximity or in a few cases in the same cell or room in unofficial places of detention. While OHCHR did not record incidents of violence against women by men detainees, such practice generally puts women at heightened risk of gender-based violence. Women interviewees also frequently described that guards of women were men.[47]

66. Only very few interviewees reported that they had seen external monitors visit a place of detention, let alone had the possibility to submit a complaint. Some civilian detainees were asked to sign statements or

[43] In Russian policy, Ukrainian nationalism is considered extremist. The strategy on countering extremism states that "one of its key tasks is the liquidation of threats of an extremist nature emanating from Ukraine" and links the priorities of preventing "extremism, neo-Nazism and Ukrainian nationalism". Presidential Decree No. 1124 (28 December 2024) "On approval of the strategy for countering extremism in the Russian Federation", item 13.
[44] Internees shall be accommodated and administered separately from prisoners of war and from persons deprived of their liberty for any other reason, Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 84.
[45] The Third Geneva Convention does not provide a process for assessing the lawfulness of internment of POWs because they are for the most part captured on the battlefield and recognizable because of their uniform. POWs are inherently a security threat as "enemy forces" and may be interned until the end of hostilities.
[46] The man was a civilian at the time of the arrest.
[47] Women shall be confined in separate quarters and shall be under direct supervision of women; Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 76; Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 75(5).

record videos before release indicating that they were treated well, in an attempt to counter potential allegations of wrongdoing.

Information and notification about detention and contact with the outside world

> *"It is not your business, do not interfere. You will be told later what you need to know."*
>
> *– a reply from the Russian occupation authorities to a request of a daughter for information about her detained mother.*

67. Relatives of detained civilians consistently reported recurrent difficulties in obtaining information about the fate and whereabouts of detained loved ones.[48] Many of these cases appear to constitute enforced disappearances.

68. In at least 123 cases, relatives of civilian detainees had no or only very vague information about the whereabouts or fate of their detained loved ones for prolonged periods of time. For example, a married couple was arrested by men in military uniform in occupied Melitopol in late September 2023. Despite official requests to several Russian authorities, their family was unable to ascertain their location of detention for months. Then, in February 2024, men in military uniform dropped off the woman at a local hospital. She was in a coma and died three months later without fully regaining consciousness. After her death, another detainee stated that he had seen the woman in an unofficial place of detention run by the FSB and that she was subjected to torture there. The fate and whereabouts of her husband remain unknown as of August 2025.

69. Family members were generally not proactively notified of the detention of their loved ones. In many cases, they had to seek information by approaching occupying authorities locally or contacting authorities in the Russian Federation, but typically were dismissed or given only vague information. In one case, the relatives of a man who had disappeared in late 2024 following a "filtration process"[49] reported that they had addressed several Russian authorities about him. The family received no reply. Only after hiring an attorney, they received a letter from police five months later in spring 2025 indicating that the man was detained by the FSB, which the FSB however denied. His fate and whereabouts remain unknown as of September 2025. In three other cases, Russian authorities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Office of the Prosecutor General, refused to initiate criminal investigations upon requests of relatives into the disappearance of their loved ones (two men and one woman). The official response letters stated that the individuals had provided written statements that they were not subjected to abduction or other unlawful action and that their absence was voluntary.

70. Even when the detainee's whereabouts was known, communication or visits were often prohibited or severely restricted and left families without information on the fate of their loved ones, including their health status. Frequent and multiple transfers of civilian detainees, as outlined in paragraphs 47-50 above, added further obstacles for family members to identify the whereabouts of and remain in touch with their loved ones. In one case in Zaporizhzhia region, a man was detained by Russian authorities in September 2022. Family members were able to initially drop parcels at a local police detention facility and unofficially pass short written messages. About a month later, the family was told not to come anymore

[48] In relation to communication with relatives on Government-controlled territory, the correspondence between family members through the telephone/postal system across closed borders/frontlines is often unadvisable or impossible. The option to use intermediaries, such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement or the network of Ombudspersons to support the exchange of family news has been underused.

[49] A "filtration process" is system of security checks and personal data collection during which civilians have also been deprived of their liberty; see OHCHR, Detention of civilians report, paras 57 et seq.

and to stop looking for their relative. Despite approaching various Russian authorities, the family could not learn his whereabouts until March 2024.

Impacts of prolonged detention and lack of information and communication on families

71. OHCHR spoke to 28 family members of civilian detainees about the impacts of the lack of information and communication with their loved ones. They described how the uncertainty and silence caused them high levels of stress and agony, which resulted in depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, panic attacks, migraines, weight changes, a worsening of chronic medical conditions, as well as problems with their work, social and family life. Details about torture and ill-treatment and the dire conditions in places of detention in general have further compounded their worry and anxiety. [50]

72. Prolonged detention of civilians negatively impacted the standard of living of their families, particularly women and children. Some women partners of civilian detainees reported experiencing financial hardship after becoming the sole head of the household. Women often struggled balancing this with family duties, continuing to care for children or older members of the family. Mothers explained their worries about how separation would affect the development and mental health of their children. Despite numerous challenges, some women formed organizations to provide one another support and advocate for the rights of civilian detainees.

D. Accountability

73. While article 21 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation prohibits torture, violence or other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment, torture has not yet been criminalized as an independent offence in the Criminal Code.[51]

74. In June 2023, the Russian Parliament adopted a law that exempts from criminal liability current military personnel and persons who voluntarily enlisted or were conscripted in the Russian armed forces once they received a State decoration or completed their military service because of age, injury or the end of martial law or mobilisation. Additionally, criminal investigations against such military personnel may be suspended upon command request.[52] In March 2024, the Russian Federation amended its Criminal Code expanding exemptions from criminal accountability for these categories of persons[53] thereby further weaking the legal framework for accountability, including for gross violations of IHRL and serious violations of IHL.

75. OHCHR is not aware of any systematic effort by the Russian authorities to investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment of Ukrainian civilian detainees.[54]

[50] Under IHRL, families are also recognized as victims of enforced disappearances.
[51] Liability for acts of torture is incurred under several articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, including 117 (cruel treatment), 286 (abuse of power), 302 (coercion to testify) and 356 (application of prohibited means and methods of warfare).
[52] Law No. 270-FZ "On peculiarities of criminal liability of individuals participating in the special military operation", for details, see OHCHR, "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 February to 31 July 2023", paras. 128- 129.
[53] Federal Law 64-FZ "On Amending the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and the Criminal Procedure Code of the Russian Federation". For details, see OHCHR, "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 March to 31 May 2024", para. 81.
[54] OHCHR requested information from the authorities of the Russian Federation through Note Verbale of 18 July 2025 about allegations, investigations and prosecutions for torture and ill-treatment of Ukrainian civilian detainees but has not received a response.

E. Release and return of Ukrainian civilian detainees by the Russian Federation

76. In accordance with international law, civilian detainees should be unconditionally released as soon as lawful grounds for their detention cease to exist.

77. In the framework of POW exchanges in May and August 2025, the Russian Federation returned 179 civilian detainees to Ukraine. According to information available to OHCHR, this included Ukrainian prisoners who had been serving sentences in detention facilities in areas that were occupied after the full-scale armed attack and were later illegally deported to prisons in the Russian Federation. In addition, Ukrainian citizens arrested and detained on criminal charges and in "immigration detention" were among the group.

F. Conclusions and recommendations

78. The findings outlined set out how the Russian Federation has subjected Ukrainian civilian detainees to consistent patterns of serious violations of IHL and gross violations of IHRL. The Russian Federation did not develop a legal framework for internment of civilians in occupied territory of Ukraine and applies Russian criminal law, which violates the IHL requirement to maintain existing legal systems. Torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence, have been applied in a systematic and widespread manner in places of detention. Frequent violations of applicable legal conditions and procedural safeguards, in combination with lack of accountability, have created an environment enabling torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances to occur. The cumulative effect of these measures has placed many Ukrainian civilians outside the effective protection of the law during their detention and contributed to an oppressive environment and climate of fear in occupied territory of Ukraine.[55]

79. Key recommendations to the Russian Federation:

    a) **Immediately cease and publicly condemn extrajudicial execution, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence against civilian detainees, and end all unlawful practices relating to detention.**

    b) **Conduct a systematic review of the cases of Ukrainian civilians detained in relation to the armed conflict, and unconditionally release them as soon as the lawful reasons for their deprivation of liberty cease to exist.**

    c) **Criminalize torture and ill-treatment in line with international law and repeal provisions in the Criminal Code exempting persons enlisting in the Russian armed forces and serving Russian military personnel from criminal liability for serious human rights violations.**

    d) **Conclude practical arrangements for the release, repatriation, and return to places of residence for civilians detained in relation to the armed conflict, taking into account humanitarian considerations, such as the situation of pregnant women, the wounded and sick, older persons, and persons who have been detained for a long time, including through engagement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and, if appropriate, with a Protecting Power.**

    e) **Ensure humane conditions in all places of deprivation of liberty, including access to adequate food, water, hygiene and medical care.**

    f) **Ensure effective implementation of safeguards for Ukrainian civilian detainees, including the prompt provision of information about the reasons for their detention, periodic review of detention decisions, access to effective appeal procedures and access to lawyers of their choice.**

[55] See also OHCHR, Russian occupation of territory of Ukraine and its aftermath, para. 35.

g) **Conduct timely and effective investigations into all allegations of deaths in custody, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment and ensure prosecution of those responsible and access for victims to justice, consistent with international standards.**

h) **Cease all practices of deporting Ukrainian detainees to the Russian Federation.**

i) **Establish an official Information Bureau which collects, centralizes and transmits the relevant information on the fate and whereabouts of Ukrainian civilians who have been deprived of their liberty by the Russian Federation.**

j) **Encourage the wide use of communication means between those deprived of their liberty and their families, including through engagement with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other potential intermediaries.**

k) **Ensure effective oversight of places of detention and provide independent and impartial monitors, in particular the ICRC, immediate, full and unimpeded access to all places where Ukrainian civilian detainees are held.**

80. Key recommendations to the international community:

l) **Continue to request access for independent monitors, including the ICRC and OHCHR, to detainees in the hands of the Russian Federation;**

m) **Support steps to conclude practical arrangements for the release, repatriation and return to places of residence for civilians detained in relation to the armed conflict;**

n) **Provide adequate funding and support for services for survivors of torture and all forms of sexual violence.**

VI. CONFLICT-RELATED DETAINEES HELD BY UKRAINE

G. Conflict-related detainees

"I did not want to become a person with disability, so I signed the papers"

– a conflict-related detainee on extraction of his confession.

81. Ukraine detains individuals in conflict-related criminal cases on charges related to national security.[56] These charges cover a wide range of criminal offenses, many of which implicate serious and harmful acts, such as of treason and sabotage. [57] Many conflict-related criminal cases involve charges of "collaboration" with the Russian occupying authorities[58], an offence introduced into the Criminal Code of Ukraine in March 2022. The law defines "collaboration" as covering a broad range of activities. OHCHR previously documented that some individuals have been prosecuted for such collaboration because they carried out ordinary work for the benefit of the community, which can be lawfully compelled by the occupying authorities under IHL. For instance, people were prosecuted for working in emergency services, construction, water services, humanitarian relief and garbage removal under occupation.[59]
82. The vast majority of such conflict-related detainees are of Ukrainian nationality; only a few are Russian citizens.
83. As of 21 July 2025, the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine reported that 2,258 conflict-related detainees were held in official pre-trial and penal facilities in Ukraine. According to the website of the Office of the Prosecutor General, since 24 February 2022, Ukrainian authorities have launched 22,814 criminal investigations in conflict-related cases.

H. Legal basis of detention of conflict-related detainees in Ukraine

84. Ukraine detains individuals in conflict-related cases based on the applicable provisions of its Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. The detention of a State's own nationals during armed conflict is primarily regulated by IHRL. While Russian citizens benefit from the protection of the Fourth Geneva Convention as protected persons, Ukraine also applies its national criminal legislation when detaining Russian citizens. Under IHRL, States may derogate from certain obligations in times of public emergency situations threatening the life of the nation, such as when posed by armed conflict.[60] The prohibitions of torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence, of arbitrary detention and of enforced disappearances are however non-derogable and continue to apply at all times.[61]

[56] The term "conflict-related cases" is understood to encompass criminal cases against individuals under charges laid down in arts 109-114[2], 258-258[6], 260, 436-442 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. It does not include POWs held by Ukraine charged under these articles.
[57] For details on the use of children by the Russian Federation in Government-controlled territory to conduct surveillance and transmit information on the Ukrainian military, or to commit acts of sabotage and arson targeting military objectives or public property with links to the military, see OHCHR, Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025, paras. 31 – 38.
[58] According to official statistics published by the Office of the Prosecutor General, 10,218 cases related to "collaborationism".
[59] For further analysis on human rights concerns in "collaboration cases", see OHCHR, Russian Occupation of Territory of Ukraine and Aftermath, paras. 167 - 176.
[60] Since 1 March 2022, Ukraine has regularly notified the United Nations Secretary-General of its derogation from article 9 of the ICCPR for the duration of the martial law. Those are available publicly: https://treaties.un.org/ (last visited 22 July 2025).
[61] See General Comment No. 35, para. 65-66. During international armed conflict, substantive and procedural rules of IHL remain applicable.

I. Key findings on the treatment of conflict-related detainees

85. OHCHR has regular and unimpeded access to conflict-related detainees in pre-trial detention facilities and penal colonies in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. For the analysis of this report, OHCHR has conducted 409 confidential interviews (249 men, 146 women, 12 boys and 2 girls) in 17 official places of detention in 11 regions of Ukraine and with individuals after their release from detention. OHCHR also monitored 180 trial hearings in conflict-related cases and analysed more than 2,000 court cases relating to "collaboration" charges. The information was collected between 1 June 2023 and 10 September 2025.

Use of pre-trial detention in conflict-related cases

86. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code introduced by Ukraine in April 2022 limited the available measures of restraint in most conflict-related cases to pre-trial detention without the alternative to choose less intrusive measures, such as house arrest. Judges may grant bail.[62] However, OHCHR analysis of 409 cases indicates bail was applied in three per cent of the cases. In most cases where it was applied, bail was set only after a significant period of pre-trial detention, which varied from six months to over two years.

87. In the majority of cases analyzed by OHCHR, prosecutors typically enumerated a list of standard risks identified in the law as justifications for pre-trial detention but did not apply them to the circumstances of the specific case and did not provide substantial justification why the risks had not reduced over time. [63] Courts generally accepted such motions without further questioning.

Treatment and conditions of detention

> *"Operatives of the Security Service tied my arms and legs to a chair with plastic straps, hit my face, applied electroshocks to my legs and burnt my left leg with a cigarette. Afterwards, they ordered me to say on video that I got these injuries as a result of an accident"*
>
> *– a conflict-related detainee on his interrogation before entering an official place of detention.*

88. Of the 409 conflict-related detainees interviewed for this report, 117 (90 men, 25 women and 2 boys) gave credible and reliable accounts of torture and ill-treatment in different settings of deprivation of liberty. The majority of these instances of torture or ill-treatment occurred in 2022.

Main methods

89. The main methods of torture and ill-treatment included punching with fists or beatings with objects, such as gun butts and batons, and threats of violence against detainees or their relatives. Other less frequent methods included suffocation, electric shocks, stabbing, slaps, sleep deprivation (22 cases), death threats and mock executions (22 cases).

[62] On 4 April 2022, the Law No. 2198-IX introduced a new provision 6 to article 176 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine which states that during martial law, the only measure of restraint that may be applied to individuals who are suspected or accused of committing crimes under arts. 109 – 114-2, 258 – 258-6, 260, 261, 437 – 442-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine is pre-trial detention.
[63] On this issue, see also European Court of Human Rights, Berezhna v. Ukraine, (40424/23) of 3 April 2025 and Gordyna v. Ukraine (10416/24) of 28 August 2025

90. In 18 cases affecting 12 men and 6 women, torture or ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees included forms of sexual violence. This included mainly threats of sexual violence against detainees or members of their families, but also cases of forced nudity, beatings while naked and one case of attempted rape.

Context and circumstances of torture and ill-treatment

91. Most reported instances of torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees (85 men, 25 women and 2 boys) occurred soon after apprehension, during initial interrogations by investigative authorities. In most cases, the purpose of the torture or ill-treatment appeared to be the extraction of self-incriminating statements, on paper or recorded on camera, or testimonies against others. For example, in one case, a woman reported that the SBU came to her house in early 2024 for a search and threatened to take away her sister if she refused to make a pre-prepared self-incriminating statement.

92. OHCHR also documented 14 instances of torture and ill-treatment in official places of detention, mostly beatings or threats, or during transfer. Of these, five cases involved penitentiary staff. For example, three detainees were subjected to a so-called "admission procedure", including being beaten and kicked by guards upon arrival at the facility, in Dnipro in 2022. In five other cases, which occurred in different facilities in Kyiv, Chernivtsi, Odesa and Kharkiv from March to December 2023, interviewees reported that other inmates had beaten them with the knowledge of the pre-trial facility administration.

Conditions of detention

93. Several interviewees reported experiencing poor detention conditions in pre-trial detention facilities, including clogged sewage pipes, dampness and mold in cells, low food quality and lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

94. The State Penitentiary Service has taken some measures to refurbish detention facilities. For example, in Kyiv pre-trial facility, conflict-related detainees were moved to a separate ward with refurbished cells. However, due to rising numbers of conflict-related detainees, the cells in the facility were overcrowded, and may lack beds for all the detainees. Authorities noted that the State Penitentiary Service had insufficient funding for improving conditions because of the armed conflict and that salaries for penitentiary staff generally were low.

Places of detention

95. Conflict-related detainees are primarily held in temporary detention facilities, pre-trial detention facilities and penal colonies that are part of the Ukrainian official detention infrastructure.

96. OHCHR documented some use of unofficial places of detention of civilians for periods of up to several months. Most cases occurred during the first months of the full-scale armed attack in 2022.[64] For example, five residents of Kharkiv region told OHCHR they were taken to a penal colony in September 2022 and detained there for periods ranging from several days to three months without official recording and court review. They did not receive any official explanation and did not have access to the outside world. The interviewees described that they spent most of the time sitting on a concrete floor with their hands tied, received food only once per day and were subjected to regular beatings.

97. OHCHR received 31 reports from interviewees about being held in unofficial places of detention after June 2023. They were held in basements, apartments, hotel rooms or offices of the investigative authorities for periods of up to several days. In 17 of these cases, detainees were subjected to beatings and threats, which occurred mainly during interrogation in these unofficial places of detention.

Responsible authorities

98. The investigation of conflict-related crimes falls mainly under the authority of the SBU. Interviewees alleged that SBU officers were responsible for acts of torture or ill-treatment in the majority of instances (97). In

[64] For details, see OHCHR, Detention of civilians report. para. 99.

addition, 17 interviewees reported that torture or ill-treatment was perpetrated by National Police or members of the Ukrainian armed forces.

99. The responsibility for treatment within official places of detention covered in this report falls under the State Penitentiary Service within the Ministry of Justice or under the National Police.

Key procedural safeguards and legal conditions

> *"During the arrest, I was thrown against a wall. My head and arm really hurt, but the doctor told me 'not to complain.'"*
>
> *– a woman conflict-related detainee on the medical check-up upon admission to a temporary detention facility.*

100. Key procedural safeguards and legal conditions were generally adhered to in official places of detention in Ukraine, including possibilities for conflict-related detainees to access lawyers, to challenge detention decisions and submit complaints to the detention administration or other relevant authorities. Detainees had access to communication in accordance with national legislation[65] and regular visits by international and national monitors.[66]

101. The State Penitentiary Service strengthened safeguards in places of detention.[67] In 2024, the State Penitentiary Service introduced new positions of inspectors in several penitentiary facilities whose core task is to identify cases of torture and ill-treatment.

102. Several areas for improvement however remain. For example, 16 interviewees reported that they had visible injuries from beatings when they arrived at penitentiary facilities. Even though in some cases medical units recorded the injuries, several interviewees were not aware whether the medical units subsequently reported potential abuse.[68] One interviewee stated that, upon admission to Vinnytsia pre-trial detention in early 2023, the medical unit did not record the bruises he had on his legs as a result of being beaten by SBU officers on the previous day.

103. In some cases, individuals arrested on conflict-related charges did not have immediate access to a lawyer and the initial questioning of a suspect sometimes took place in the absence of legal counsel. Although testimonies obtained without a lawyer cannot be used in court,[69] such practices make it easier for law enforcement officials to exert undue pressure on suspects.

[65] This right may be limited in accordance with national law.
[66] Ukraine established a National Preventive Mechanism.
[67] In this regard, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted strategic documents which address penitentiary reform, including Regulation No. 475 of 14 May 2025 which *inter alia* approved a Roadmap on the Rule of Law and Regulation No. 1153 of 16 December 2022 which approved the Strategy for Reforming the Penitentiary System for the period up to 2026.
[68] According to national procedure, in case of discovery of bodily injuries of a detainee, medical personnel draft a report containing a description of the injuries, explanation of the detainee on the circumstances they sustained injuries and opinion of the medical personnel on the origin of injuries. One copy of the report is then shared with the detainee. Ukraine has committed to improving the procedure of recording bodily injuries of detainees by medical personnel in line with international obligations as part of its Strategy for Reforming the Penitentiary System (ibid.).
[69] Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, art. 615, para. 11.

J. Accountability

"In 2022, I submitted a complaint to SBI about unlawful detention and ill-treatment. They opened the case only after the court issued them an order, but then closed it quickly. They had to re-open it because I appealed the decision. Now it is May 2025, but still nobody has taken my statement about what happened".

– a man conflict-related detainee on the investigation of alleged human rights violations.

104. Article 28 of the Constitution of Ukraine prohibits torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment that violates a person's dignity. Torture is criminalized under article 127 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.

105. The number of prosecutions on charges of torture and ill-treatment remained limited. According to the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI), which is the central entity in Ukraine responsible for investigating alleged crimes perpetrated by law enforcement, since June 2023, they have sent to court 123 criminal cases involving torture or ill-treatment allegedly committed by law enforcement.[70] Details on how many victims were conflict-related detainees and the outcome in these cases were not available.

106. Thirty-two conflict-related detainees interviewed by OHCHR reported that they had complained about arbitrary detention, torture or ill-treatment to a variety of authorities, including the SBI, National Police, courts, the Ombudsperson's Office or the European Court of Human Rights. In at least 27 cases, investigations were launched by the SBI. According to most interviewees, there has been little or no progress in these investigations.

107. Of those investigations opened, most were opened only following a court's order. In some cases, investigations were closed without interviewing the victims. Courts often did not question the grounds for closing investigations. For example, in arguing to close an inquiry into an alleged week-long arbitrary detention of a woman in a private apartment in Dnipro in 2023, the SBI stated that she had voluntarily agreed to stay there for a week, accompanied by officers of the SBU. The first instance court accepted that statement without questioning and found the defendant guilty of collaboration under occupation. The appeal court stated that the first-instance court did not consider the claim of arbitrary detention and quashed the verdict, upholding the individual's rights.[71]

108. OHCHR documented one case where pre-trial investigations into torture allegations proceeded to court in July 2025. The case involved a 68-year-old conflict-related detainee who was allegedly beaten by a penitentiary staff in the Mykolaiv pre-trial facility in April 2024. However, the detainee remained in detention after a surgery due to the beatings, and the alleged perpetrator, after a temporary suspension, continued to work in the facility.

K. Transfer of conflict-related detainees in the framework of POW exchanges

109. As outlined in section V of this report, high numbers of Ukrainian civilian detainees remained in detention in occupied territory of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for reasons or actions related to the armed

[70] Response from SBI of 15 August 2025 on a request from OHCHR for information. Out of the total, SBI submitted 44 cases to court in 2025.
[71] The information is from the guilty verdict of 28 December 2023.

conflict. In response to this situation, the Ukrainian Government took several measures with a view to supporting diplomatic efforts to release its citizens from detention by the Russian Federation.

110. In July 2024, the Coordination Headquarters on the Treatment of POWs, the Ombudsperson Office and SBU launched a project entitled "I want to go back to my people". The project involved a website featuring personal data of convicted conflict-related detainees, mostly Ukrainian nationals,[72] who reportedly agreed to be transferred to the Russian Federation.

111. In the context of a POW exchange on 23 May 2025,[73] Ukraine also transferred 120 civilians to the Ukraine-Belarus border as part of an agreement on "simultaneous releases" with the Russian Federation. According to information received by OHCHR, at least 70 conflict-related civilian detainees were part of the group transferred to the Russian Federation. Of those, the website "I want to go back to my people" later reported that 31 had "left for the Russian Federation". Ukrainian national legislation allows for detainees, including those suspected, accused and found guilty of offenses, to provide written consent to be "exchanged as a POW".[74] A court takes the final decision about releasing the detainee for the purpose of such "exchange".[75] Individuals released under this procedure continue to be tried in absentia in Ukraine.

112. OHCHR interviewed conflict-related detainees who confirmed their wish to be transferred to the Russian Federation, citing a variety of reasons for this choice. Nevertheless, these initiatives raised several human rights concerns, including the extent to which persons in detention – an inherently coercive environment – could give fully voluntary and informed consent to such exchange and that some individuals were apparently requested to sign a document renouncing their Ukrainian citizenship.[76] Additionally, in some cases, the procedure for detainees to consent to exchange was rushed, which intensified pressure for the individual to agree. OHCHR documented several cases of conflict-related detainees who were woken up around midnight by prison authorities and requested to sign the agreement to be "exchanged as POW" so that they could be included in an imminent release. While they had the possibility for a phone call, the decisions were confirmed by a court without the presence of a lawyer. Very limited information was available about the situation of individuals after their transfer to the Russian Federation.

Other civilians involved in the "simultaneous release" between Ukraine and the Russian Federation

In addition to conflict-related detainees, civilians transferred to the Russian Federation from Ukraine also included Russian citizens held in immigration detention and Russian civilians whom the Ukrainian armed forces evacuated from Kursk region of the Russian Federation because of hostilities. While these groups are not within the scope of this report, their inclusion raises additional human rights concerns.

When repatriating Russian citizens, Ukrainian authorities must fully respect the principle of non-refoulement. Russian citizens must have access to a procedure where they can express their concerns as to return and have those fears individually and independently assessed.[77] Furthermore, as those evacuated from Kursk are not interned, they are thus entitled to leave Ukraine, unless their departure is considered contrary to the national interests of the State.[78]

[72] The website itself raises concerns about whether the release of personal information serves a legitimate purpose, and whether persons held in detention can give free and informed consent to this release.
[73] On 14 and 24 August 2025, POW exchanges also included civilians. OHCHR did not have detailed information on the number and background of civilians transferred to the Russian Federation at the time of publication of this report.
[74] Although they are not POWs under IHL which clearly distinguishes between civilians and combatants (who are interned under POW framework of the Third Geneva Convention).
[75] Criminal Code of Ukraine with article 84-1; Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, art. 201-1.
[76] Ukrainian legislation does not allow renunciation of citizenship for a person who is suspected of a crime or convicted in Ukraine. It also prohibits withdrawal from citizenship, if in this case a person becomes stateless, Law of Ukraine "On citizenship of Ukraine" No. 2235-III of 18 January 2001, arts. 18 – 19.
[77] Convention against Torture, art. 3.
[78] Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 35.

L. Conclusions and recommendations

113. Since the full-scale armed attack against Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the increased number of conflict-related detainees has strained the criminal justice system of Ukraine. The authorities have taken steps to strengthen procedural safeguards and improve detention conditions; however, a number of concerns remain. OHCHR continues to document instances of torture and ill-treatment of conflict-related detainees by Ukrainian authorities, and accountability remains limited. The process of accession to the European Union offers a further opportunity to analyze systematically the risk factors in the penitentiary system for exposure to torture and ill-treatment and to further strengthen safeguards and accountability, in line with Ukraine's international obligations.

114. Key recommendations to Ukraine:

a) **Ensure that conflict-related civilian detainees are treated in full compliance with IHL and IHRL, including in particular by protecting them from torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence at all stages of deprivation of liberty.**

b) **Conduct timely and effective investigations of all allegations of arbitrary arrests, torture or ill-treatment perpetrated by military and law enforcement agents in the context of prosecution of conflict-related crimes, in accordance with international standards.**

c) **Ensure that all efforts to return civilian detainees from Russian captivity protect the rights of all persons affected by this process, in compliance with IHL and IHRL.**

d) **Use pre-trial detention as a measure of last resort.**

e) **Strengthen effectiveness of reporting and complaint systems and ensure collection of disaggregated data on complaints of torture and ill-treatment, investigations and their outcomes for analysis with a view to informing policy-decisions.**

115. Key recommendations to the international community:

f) **Provide targeted and sustained financial support to strengthen Ukraine's penitentiary system, in light of the increased burden caused by the armed conflict.**

g) **Support capacity-building and training programmes for penitentiary staff on international human rights standards; for medical personnel working in detention settings on identification, documentation and reporting on torture and ill-treatment, in line with the Istanbul Protocol.**