



24 FEBRUARY 2022 - 31 DECEMBER 2025

FORCED DISPLACEMENT

FROM TERRITORY OF UKRAINE OCCUPIED BY THE RUSSIAN
FEDERATION: FORCIBLE TRANSFER AND DEPORTATION,
BARRIERS TO RETURN, AND THE RIGHTS OF INTERNALLY
DISPLACED PERSONS.

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20 March 2026



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



How do I feel about leaving my home? That's where I spent my childhood, where my parents lived, and where my mother remains. The feeling of injustice is crushing me, but my faith in God allows me to carry on and hope that sooner or later we will return and justice will prevail.

-Rustem, the imam of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, left in early April 2022.

1. This thematic report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documents the direct and indirect forcible transfers and deportations of persons from territory occupied by the Russian Federation, barriers for displaced persons to return to occupied territory, and the limitations in the ability of people displaced from occupied territory to fully exercise their rights in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. It covers the period 24 February 2022 to 31 December 2025.
2. The report assesses conduct that may amount to forcible transfer or deportation under international humanitarian law (IHL), distinct from displacement caused directly by active hostilities. While many civilians fled fighting moving both internally within Ukraine and externally, the report focuses on displacement resulting from widespread and systematic discriminatory measures imposed by the occupying authorities, which deprived civilians of any genuine choice to remain in or return to occupied territory. These measures were enforced through threats, detention, torture and ill-treatment, and prosecution under laws inconsistent with IHL and international human rights law (IHRL) and had a discriminatory effect on specific groups of the population. Those affected face specific vulnerabilities compared with persons displaced solely by hostilities, in particular a heightened risk of protracted displacement.
3. The report documents forcible transfers and deportations of individuals perceived by the occupying authorities as disloyal or non-compliant with imposed policies, including through the peaceful and lawful expression of identity or refusal to adhere to unlawful requirements. It further analyses how legal and administrative policies in occupied areas created coercive conditions that compelled civilians to leave and impeded their return.
4. Displaced persons have a right to voluntary return in safety and with dignity to their homes or places of habitual residence. For these people – independently of the reason for their initial displacement – the occupying authorities’ policies and practices constitute significant barriers to return. For many, the choice is between accepting violations of their fundamental rights, or to not return at all. Extensive confiscation of private property belonging to displaced people make return even more difficult, and restrictions and bans on entry to the occupied territory block return entirely.
5. Compared to persons forcibly displaced within Government-controlled territory, internally displaced persons (IDPs) arriving from occupied territory faced specific barriers to the full exercise of their rights. Gaps in civil documentation, non-recognition of education credentials or work history, and limited access to housing compensation, often due to rules and procedures not adapted to the realities of occupation, created cumulative disadvantages. People-centred recovery planning requires closing these gaps to ensure equal access to services, regardless of place of origin.
6. The Russian Federation should discontinue all policies and practices that are not in line with IHL and IHRL and remove barriers to return for people who have been displaced, irrespective of their nationality, political opinion, cultural identity, religious affiliation or sexual orientation. The international community should ensure that peace negotiations include the meaningful consideration of the situations and interests of displaced persons and address specifically their voluntary, safe and dignified return to places of origin in occupied territory, with full respect for their human rights and international humanitarian law. In the meantime, Ukrainian authorities must implement targeted measures to protect the rights of persons displaced from occupied territory, meet their specific needs, and ensure their access to durable solutions, particularly local integration.

II. METHODOLOGY



My home and my homeland mean the world to me. My ancestors, many generations of them, are buried there. I can't go back, I can't see any of it, and it hurts me deeply.

– Olena, a civil servant from Zaporizhzhia region, was detained by the occupying authorities and subsequently forced into labor in occupied territory.

7. In preparing the report, OHCHR¹ conducted firsthand interviews with persons displaced from occupied territory, supplemented by remotely conducted interviews with persons living in occupied territory and with those travelling between occupied territory and Government-controlled areas of Ukraine. In-person interviews were conducted in Government-controlled areas of Ukraine. OHCHR also conducted a systematic review and analysis of laws, policies, decrees, administrative acts and regulations, as well as public statements issued by the occupying authorities of the Russian Federation in occupied territory of Ukraine, as published by official sources.
8. Since February 2022, OHCHR has carried out 420 field visits, 147 visits to transit centres and collective centres for IDPs, and interviewed 4255² victims and witnesses of alleged violations of IHRL and IHL, as well as their relatives and lawyers, Government officials, members of civil society and other interlocutors with direct knowledge of the human rights situation in occupied territory. OHCHR further conducted a systematic review and analysis of Ukrainian laws, policies, administrative acts and regulations related to the protection of IDPs, with a particular focus on those from occupied territory.
9. Findings included in the report meet the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard, namely where, based on a body of verified information, an ordinarily 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.
10. OHCHR abided strictly by the obligations to ‘do no harm’ and respect informed consent of all sources, including by taking measures to safeguard the confidentiality of information and protect the identity of sources. Contact with interlocutors was established only after assessing the risks for their life, safety, freedom or well-being, and interviews were conducted in a trauma-informed manner.
11. The Russian Federation has not granted OHCHR access to occupied territory and OHCHR reiterates its request for safe, secure and unhindered access to occupied territory, in line with resolution 80/223 (2025) of the General Assembly.

¹ OHCHR’s field presence in Ukraine the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, was deployed on 14 March 2014 to monitor and report on the human rights situation throughout Ukraine, with particular attention to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, and to propose recommendations to the Government and other actors to address human rights concerns. See A/HRC/27/75, paras. 7-8.

² 2099 men and 2125 women, 12 boys and 19 girls.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK



I miss my home so much. I want to return to my hometown, but I realize that as long as the Russian occupation continues, that's impossible. Still, I have hope that sooner or later, we'll all be able to live where we want.

– Yuriy, a neurologist from Donetsk, spent seven years and seven months in prison in occupied territory after being charged with espionage by the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk people's republic'. He cannot return home.

12. The Russian Federation and Ukraine are bound by both IHRL and IHL, which apply concurrently in armed conflict and are complementary and mutually reinforcing.
13. The nature and scope of the powers and duties of an occupying power under IHL is premised on the assumption that occupation is a temporary situation to respond to military necessity and does not transfer title of sovereignty to the occupying Power.³ The occupying Power is required to respect the existing laws and institutions of the occupied territory as far as possible and may not introduce far-reaching changes to the existing order or intrinsic characteristics of the occupied territory.⁴ Under IHRL, human rights obligations of States apply extraterritorially in all circumstances where they exercise jurisdiction or effective control, including in occupied territory.⁵
14. The forcible removal of protected persons from occupied territory, whether individually or *en masse* and regardless of the destination, is prohibited under IHL.⁶ The only exceptions are evacuations for the security of the population or imperative military reasons.⁷ Forcible transfer or deportation can be direct, such as when a party to a conflict orders it or is directly involved in organizing or carrying it out.⁸ It can also be indirect – when a party commits violations of IHRL or IHL that have the effect of depriving the population of any genuine choice to remain, for example by unlawfully destroying houses or imposing collective punishments, or by imposing severe living conditions that leave the persons concerned with no genuine choice. It can also be effected through acts deliberately aimed at preventing or impeding the return of the population. For example, depending on the circumstances, it could be inferred from the demolition of the private homes of displaced persons that the displacing Party does not intend those persons to return. The prohibition against forcible transfer or deportation, as contained in Article 49(1) of the Fourth Geneva Convention excludes only truly voluntary departures that are the expression of an individual’s ‘genuine choice’ or ‘free will’, which must be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account all relevant circumstances.^{9,10}

³ ICJ, *Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*, 19 July 2024, paras. 105-106.

⁴ Hague Regulations, art. 43; Fourth Geneva Convention (GCIV), art. 47; Additional Protocol I, art. 4; GCIV 2025 Commentary, paras. 3114-3117.

⁵ Human Rights Committee, General Comments No. 31 (para. 10) and no. 36 (para. 63); CESCR General Comment No. 24, para. 27; CESCR, Concluding observations on the Russian Federation, E/C.12/RUS/CO/7, paras. 4-5. International Court of Justice, *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 9 July 2004, paras. 109 to 114; International Court of Justice, *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*, 19 July 2024, paras. 98-9. Both Ukraine and the Russian Federation have ratified, *inter alia*, the ICCPR, ICESCR, Convention Against Torture (CAT), and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

⁶ GCIV, art. 49; GCIV 2025 Commentary, para. 3168.

⁷ Art. 49 (2) exceptionally allows temporary evacuation for the security of the population or imperative military reasons. However, protected persons should not be evacuated outside the occupied territory (unless impossible to avoid such displacement) and must be transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities cease.

⁸ According to the ICRC Commentary [2025] on Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, “Forcible transfers refer to forced relocations within an occupied territory, whereas deportations refer to forced relocations ‘from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not’ (emphasis added). This distinction is confirmed by Additional Protocol I. It is also confirmed by the 1998 ICC Statute, the 2002 ICC Elements of Crime and the case law of the ICTY, the ICC and the ICJ. The ICTY has clarified that deportation can refer to forced displacement across a *de jure* State border or, in certain circumstances, a *de facto* border. In this report, both terms are used, in particular because after late 2022, there were no direct crossing points between occupied territory and territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine. Since then, people forced to leave occupied territory had to travel through the Russian Federation, and often through third countries, in order to reach territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine.

⁹ See GCIV 2025 Commentary, para. 3170-3172.

¹⁰ As per established case law, “[t]he requirement that displacement be forced is not limited to physical force but can be met through the threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, or taking advantage of a coercive environment.” ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Ratko Mladić*, Appeal Judgment, 8 June 2021, para. 356; ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Milomir Stakić*, Appeal Judgment, 2006, para. 279; ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić*, Trial Judgment, 2001, para. 529; International Criminal Court (ICC), *Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda*, Trial Judgment, 8 July 2019, para. 1056. ICJ, *Advisory Opinion, Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*, 19 July 2024, para. 145.

15. Unlawful deportation or transfer of a protected person is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.¹¹ Deportation or forcible transfer of population can also be qualified as a crime against humanity, if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.¹²
16. Displaced persons have a right to voluntary return in safety and with dignity to their homes or places of habitual residence.¹³
17. IDPs are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.¹⁴ In territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine, Ukraine has the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to IDPs, including the obligation to ensure an adequate standard of living and the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.¹⁵ To protect family life, the State must take all appropriate steps to reunite families who are separated by displacement as quickly as possible.¹⁶
18. The State shall ensure that IDPs enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. IDPs shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced, nor on the basis of their race, colour, sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, legal or social status, age, disability, property, birth, or on any other similar criteria.¹⁷
19. This report is without prejudice to the status, situation or potential protection needs of Ukrainians from occupied territory who have sought asylum or other forms of international protection in third States, whether due to actions by the Russian Federation as occupying power or due to broader hostility-related factors. Due to lack of access, OHCHR has also not pronounced upon the situation of Ukrainians from occupied territory who have been displaced to the Russian Federation and remained there or the situation of those who are internally displaced within occupied territory.

¹¹ Art. 147.

¹² Rome Statute, art. 7(1)(d).

¹³ Customary IHL, Rule 132. See also: *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, principle 28; *Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons* (Pinheiro Principles), E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, section IV.

¹⁴ *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2.

¹⁵ *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, principle 3; ICCPR, art. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, principle 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, principles 1 and 4.

IV. CONTEXT



Why did I leave occupied territory? I think the answer to that question is that I couldn't stand to spend even one more day there. Because every day felt like hell, restricting all my rights and aspirations.

– Marta, a student from Donetsk, now lives and studies in Government-controlled territory.

20. In 2022, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation triggered mass displacement, with 12.7 million Ukrainians displaced in the first two months, as people fled hostilities, becoming IDPs within Ukraine or refugees abroad.¹⁸
21. Following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian Federation illegally annexed territory of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions in October 2022.¹⁹ It had illegally annexed the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (“Crimea”) in 2014.²⁰ OHCHR has documented the application by the Russian Federation of Russian systems of governance, administration, justice and education in occupied territory, contrary to international humanitarian law,²¹ as well as associated violations of international human rights law.²²
22. As of December 2025, 3.7 million Ukrainians were internally displaced in areas controlled by the Government of Ukraine.²³ Among them, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine had registered over 878,000 IDPs in areas controlled by the Government of Ukraine who have come from occupied territory, of whom 56 per cent are women and girls.²⁴ As compared to people forcibly displaced within territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine, IDPs from occupied territory say they are less likely to return under a future scenario that involve an agreement to end the war, but with continued occupation of the territory. Under this scenario, six per cent of surveyed IDPs from occupied territory said they would return, as compared to 26 per cent of IDPs from frontline areas, and 42 per cent from other areas.²⁵ That is, the vast majority of IDPs from occupied territory consider occupation as constituting a barrier to their return, regardless of whether they originally fled because of coercive conditions or because of hostilities.

¹⁸ UNHCR, *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, 19 April 2022.

¹⁹ Federal Constitutional Laws of the Russian Federation No. 5-FKZ, 6-FKZ, 7-FKZ and 8-FKZ, 4 October 2022. On 13 October 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the organization of the ‘referenda’ and the attempted unlawful annexation of oblasts of Ukraine; see General Assembly resolution ES-11/4, *Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations*, A/RES/ES-11/4 (12 October 2022), available from undocs.org/A/RES/ES-11/4.

²⁰ On 27 March 2014, the UN General Assembly affirmed its commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and, among other things, underscored that the referendum held on 16 March had “no validity” and could not form the basis for any alteration of the status of Crimea; see General Assembly resolution 68/262, *Territorial integrity of Ukraine*, A/RES/68/262 (27 March 2014), available from undocs.org/A/RES/68/262, paras. 1 and 5.

²¹ See OHCHR, *Russian occupation and its aftermath*, paras. 81-114.

²² See: Human rights situation during the Russian occupation of territory of Ukraine and its aftermath (20 March 2024), <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/human-rights-situation-during-russian-occupation-territory-ukraine-and-its-treatment-prisoners-war-july-2024>; Treatment of prisoners of war (July 2024), <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/treatment-prisoners-war-and-update-human-rights-situation-ukraine>; Treatment of civilians deprived of their liberty (September 2025), <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/treatment-civilians-deprived-their-liberty>; UN Secretary-General, reports on the situation of human rights in temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine (2022–2025), <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/reports/crimea-and-occupied-territory-secretary-general>.

²³ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Ukraine Internal Displacement Report: General Population Survey Round 22 (January 2026)*, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), 22 January 2026, p. 2.

²⁴ Unified Register of IDPs, Ministry of Social Policy (30 November 2025); data shared with OHCHR. Among IDPs from occupied territory, 23 per cent were under 20 years old, and 21 per cent above 60 years old.

²⁵ UNHCR Intentions Survey with IDPs in Ukraine, round 6 (December 2025-January 2026); household survey covering close to 3,900 IDPs in Ukraine; data shared with OHCHR.

V. FORCED DISPLACEMENT FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORY AS A RESULT OF ACTIONS BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



Home to me is the sea, the scent of the Azov Sea, which I can't find anywhere else. It's our hometown coastline, our parks... And all these places, they're all tied to my childhood memories. It's my past; it's the place where I came into being as a person and an individuality.

– Diana, director of the Center for Preserving the Identity of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, left Mariupol on March 15, 2022.

A. Direct forcible transfers and deportations

“We have adopted the relevant regulations. Individuals who refuse to accept Russian citizenship and take a destructive stance will be recognized as foreigners. In case of a threat to public order, such persons are subject to mandatory expulsion. We must protect our citizens from the influence of the Kyiv regime.”

– Russian-appointed head of occupied Luhansk region, 18 May 2023.

23. Since seizing control of additional occupied territory of Ukraine in February 2022, the occupying authorities have, through direct action, forcibly transferred or deported protected persons from the occupied territory to territory controlled by Ukrainian authorities or third countries – most commonly those who opposed or were perceived as opposing the Russian occupation of Ukrainian territory.²⁶
24. In July 2022, the occupying authorities in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions published separate decrees announcing that individuals who failed to comply with the requirements of the occupying authorities may be “forcibly deported.”²⁷ In the following months, occupying authorities forcibly transferred or deported numerous individuals from the occupied territory to Government-controlled territory, forcing them to walk across the frontline, often at great risk due to ongoing hostilities and landmines. Most cases took place at an official crossing point in Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, but OHCHR has also documented similar cases in Kharkiv region. Some people went missing. In several cases, the occupying authorities read aloud a “deportation order” and/or forced the victim to give false statements, which were sometimes filmed and posted online.
25. For example, the occupying authorities in Melitopol repeatedly interrogated a priest of the Greek Catholic Church and pressured him to disclose parishioners’ confessions. They told him that Ukrainian-speaking parishioners were “dangerous” and might plot against the occupation. When he refused to cooperate, occupying authorities expelled him from occupied territory to Government-controlled territory through the Vasylivka crossing point.
26. Eventually, occupying authorities started deporting Ukrainians who refused to comply with the occupation to Latvia (until the border crossing closed in November 2023) and to Georgia. For example, the occupying authorities in Zaporizhzhia region repeatedly threatened a school principal who resigned rather than implement the Russian education curriculum. In April 2024, armed men took him and his wife from their home and transported them to the border with Georgia, where they were deported. They eventually made their way to Government-controlled regions of Ukraine.
27. Numerous civilians detained or imprisoned in occupied territory were transferred to Government-controlled territory of Ukraine after their release. OHCHR has interviewed 33 such civilians. Some were told explicitly that they could not return to the “Russian Federation”, which under Russian legislation includes occupied territory of Ukraine.
28. In total, OHCHR has documented that the occupying authorities have forcibly transferred or deported 104 individuals from occupied territory, including local officials, law enforcement personnel, teachers and school

²⁶ A similar practice took place in occupied Crimea. From 2017 to 2024, Russian courts in Crimea ordered the “deportation” of at least 864 individuals (mostly Ukrainian citizens) considered “foreigners”. Information from the Russian Federation court registry.

²⁷ Post by the head of the occupying authorities in Zaporizhzhia region, 15 July 2022, <https://archive.is/Py7oe> (accessed 2 January 2026). The original Telegram channel with the announcement has since been deleted. Decree 228 of 14 July 2022 by the Military-Civil Administration of Kherson region, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0PtDDKqPHpdmWFn7nDW8FPqxSBgTvWP7hxFFWta4YF9fsmfghpTVey2XnSun3qz2pl&id=100028374940771 (accessed 15 January 2026).

personnel, emergency workers, medical personnel, religious leaders, and employees of critical infrastructure facilities who, in various ways, did not cooperate with the occupying authorities.²⁸

B. Indirect forcible transfers and deportations

29. OHCHR has interviewed hundreds of people who left their homes in territory occupied by the Russian Federation. While some cited hostilities or lack of access to basic services as reasons for their departure, many explained that they fled occupied territory because of the conditions created by the imposition of Russian legislation, administration, systems and institutions²⁹ or because of policies and practices implemented by the Russian authorities that target specific groups of people based on their nationality, real or imputed political opinion, cultural identity, religious affiliation or sexual orientation. Such discriminatory measures, implemented in a widespread and systematic manner, cumulatively created a coercive environment that left some protected persons with no genuine choice but to leave.

Policies targeting nationality and political opinion

Replacement of State systems of governance and administration

30. After establishing control over additional occupied territory of Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities began unlawfully imposing the systems of governance and administration of the Russian Federation. This process affected all spheres of public life, including law enforcement, property, business, education, banking, social protection, and local governance. Occupying authorities pressured civil servants, local officials, and employees of State enterprises to accept and adopt Russian legislation, institutions and administrative systems, and to sign contracts with the Russian institutions. Civil servants and State enterprise employees who did not comply faced threats, intimidation and detention, and in some cases, enforced disappearances, torture and deportation.³⁰

31. For many, the only real choice was to comply or leave occupied territory. In occupied Zaporizhzhia region, one school director who had faced repeated threats and intimidation by the occupying authorities for refusing to reopen her school under the Russian curriculum, ultimately fled occupied territory with her family after armed soldiers came to her home and other school staff were detained. Ukrainian authorities reported that 21,188 education personnel, 13,774 medical personnel, and 6,500 people working for local government left occupied territory in the period 24 February 2022 to 31 December 2025, and are currently displaced either in Government-controlled territory or abroad.

32. In another example, after taking control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), Russian authorities gave staff an ultimatum to sign new contracts with the Russian State entity "Rosatom" or leave occupied territory. Of 16 ZNPP employees interviewed by OHCHR, 13 said that they had been detained and at least 8 tortured or ill-treated because of their refusal to comply.³¹ According to the public enterprise Enerhoatom, 5,318 ZNPP employees had left occupied territory as of 29 December 2025, of which 3,795 employees were internally displaced in Ukraine.³²

Compulsory change of citizenship

33. Following the unlawful annexation of occupied territory, Russian authorities classified Ukrainian citizens in occupied territory as "foreigners." A presidential decree adopted in 2023 set a deadline of 1 July 2024 (later extended to 31 December 2024 and then to 10 September 2025) for Ukrainians residing in occupied territory to obtain Russian citizenship, "legalize" their presence "in the Russian Federation", or face "deportation".³³

²⁸ See also OHCHR, *Russian occupation and its aftermath*, paras. 81-107.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, paras. 81-126.

³⁰ See OHCHR, *Russian occupation and its aftermath*, paras. 81-107, and *Treatment of civilians deprived of their liberty in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine*, 23 September 2025, paras. 67-70.

³¹ For more details and case examples, see OHCHR, *Russian occupation and its aftermath*, paras. 95-102

³² Correspondence with OHCHR.

³³ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, No. 307, 27 April 2023 as amended by Decree No. 11 (4 January 2024), No. 281 (22 April 2024), and No. 159 (20 March 2025), at <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/49235> (accessed 30 December 2025).

34. The Russian Federation also gradually restricted access to essential services and rights, including healthcare, pensions and social security, humanitarian aid, employment opportunities, and property ownership, in occupied territory to those holding Russian passports. Many other services also became inaccessible without a Russian passport, including opening bank accounts and obtaining insurance.³⁴
35. The establishment of martial law in occupied territory (except Crimea) in October 2022 introduced restrictions on freedom of movement to, from, and inside occupied territory.³⁵ Residents of occupied territory told OHCHR that those without Russian passports were subjected to intense scrutiny, questioning, and searches when passing through checkpoints at all major settlements and crossroads, which sometimes resulted in detention, torture and ill-treatment.³⁶
36. Faced with the threat of deportation, loss of access to essential services such as medical care and social benefits, and harassment by law enforcement officials, OHCHR understands that most residents of occupied territory who have not obtained Russian citizenship have left [as of December 2025]. In interviews with OHCHR, particularly in the months prior to the initial 1 July 2024 deadline for obtaining Russian citizenship, many people leaving the occupied territory told OHCHR that the threat of deportation was one of their main reasons for leaving.³⁷

Conscription

37. The imposition of Russian citizenship on the population in occupied territory has resulted in Ukrainian men aged 18 to 30³⁸ being treated as eligible for conscription into the Russian armed forces under Russian national legislation, although under IHL, an occupying Power cannot compel protected persons to serve in its armed forces.³⁹ Since October 2023, Russian authorities have conducted five conscription campaigns in occupied territory, and adopted measures to pressure people to join the Russian armed forces.⁴⁰ While no official statistics have been published, documents suggest that thousands of residents of occupied territory have been unlawfully conscripted into the Russian armed forces.⁴¹
38. Fear of conscription and ensuing deployment against their own country's armed forces compelled many Ukrainian men and boys to flee occupied territory to Government-controlled territory. For example, a 21-year-old man from Zaporizhzhia region told OHCHR that he was forced to obtain a Russian passport in 2023 to be able to move around. However, upon receiving the passport, he was instructed to undergo military registration; he left occupied territory to avoid serving in the Russian armed forces. A boy from Luhansk region told OHCHR that he left occupied territory a few days before his eighteenth birthday out of fear of conscription.

³⁴ OHCHR, *Russian occupation and its aftermath*, para. 115; Report of the UN Secretary-General, A/79/258, 30 July 2024, paras. 8-10.

³⁵ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, No. 756, 19 October 2022, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/48426> (accessed 19 January 2026).

³⁶ OHCHR, *Russian occupation and its aftermath*, para. 122.

³⁷ See also A/79/258, *Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol*, Report of the Secretary General, 30 July 2024, para. 10.

³⁸ The maximum age of conscription increased from 27 to 30 on 1 January 2024. Federal Law No.439-FZ, 4 August 2023, at publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202308040024

³⁹ GCIV, arts. 51, 147; Customary IHL, Rule 95.

⁴⁰ OHCHR, *Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine*, 1 June – 30 November 2025, para. 80.

⁴¹ Presidential Decree №690 from 29.09.2025 stipulated the conscription of 135000 men. The Russian Federation does not publish disaggregated data. See <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202509290020>

“We do not want to live [under occupation] with our heads down. When I crossed [into Government-controlled territory], I felt free — like I could finally breathe and speak.”

– A woman from occupied Zaporizhzhia region comparing the atmosphere of fear in occupied territory with how she felt upon arriving in territory controlled by Ukraine in October 2025.

39. In March 2022, the Russian Federation adopted legislation applicable in occupied territory of Ukraine that criminalized broadly defined acts, including the “dissemination of knowingly false information” about the armed forces and State authorities⁴² and “public actions aimed at discrediting” the Russian armed forces.⁴³ At the same time, occupying authorities extensively enforced Russian legislation regarding liability for “propaganda or public display of Nazi paraphernalia or symbols” and “distribution of information demonstrating disrespect for society, the state, official state symbols of the Russian Federation, the Constitution of the Russian Federation, or official authorities.”⁴⁴ The adoption and application of these laws in occupied territory appeared in many cases not to be justifiable under the law of occupation and to have led to violations of freedom of expression.⁴⁵
40. Since February 2022, Russian-controlled courts in occupied territory have issued at least 12 criminal convictions (against 10 men and two women) and 1,876 administrative fines (against 925 women and 951 men) applying these provisions.⁴⁶ Those prosecuted included individuals peacefully expressing dissent by holding signs or posting online messages opposing the war, criticizing the military offensive, or praising Ukrainian resistance, as well as those who conveyed such opinions in private phone messages. Convictions resulted in fines ranging from 1,000 to 100,000 RUB (12 to 1,240 USD) and detention⁴⁷ or imprisonment.
41. The occupying authorities also used other legal provisions to restrict freedom of expression. In August 2025, a 49-year-old woman from occupied Zaporizhzhia was sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment on “treason” charges for painting “Mykhailivka is Ukraine” on a wall on her street. Her sister who attended the trial reported that the woman appeared in court with broken teeth and discoloured fingernails, injuries consistent with torture, including electric shocks. Occupying authorities also prosecuted individuals for social media posts containing Ukrainian State symbols or images in blue and yellow (such as nail polish or flower bouquets) as purported displays of “Nazi” symbols.
42. Some individuals interviewed by OHCHR who held – or were perceived to hold – opinions critical of the war or occupation have reported that they fled occupied territory out of fear of prosecution due to these measures. For example, after a man from Simferopol posted a “no war” hashtag on social media, FSB⁴⁸ officers arrested him, searched his apartment, beat him and denied him medical assistance. A court fined him 40,000 roubles (500 USD)

⁴² Russian Federation Criminal Code, art. 207.3.

⁴³ Russian Federation Criminal Code, art. 280.3; The Russian Federation Code of Administrative Offenses, art. 20.3.3.

⁴⁴ Russian Federation Code of Administrative Offenses, art. 20.3(1) and 20.1(3).

⁴⁵ IHL provides exceptional circumstances in which an occupying Power may legislate in occupied territory, for instance to ensure its own security or to maintain the orderly government of the territory (GCIV, art. 64). Under international human rights law, the right to freedom of expression may be restricted under certain conditions, including for the protection of national security or public order. (ICCPR, art. 19(3)).

⁴⁶ Most of the decisions analyzed by OHCHR were issued in Crimea, and those occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, where court documents were publicly available at the date of writing the report.

⁴⁷ Individuals prosecuted under Article 20.3 (display of Nazi symbols) were subjected to administrative detention for periods ranging from 1 to 15 days.

⁴⁸ Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.

for “public actions directed at discrediting the Russian armed forces”. After a court dismissed his claim of ill-treatment, he fled occupied territory for Government-controlled territory, citing fear of further prosecution for his anti-war stance.

Policies targeting expressions of cultural identities linked to Ukraine

Replacement of Ukrainian education

“Why I [left occupied territory]? Because the authorities threatened to take away our children. Our children do not want to study in Russian language. We had to leave.”

– A man whose family was displaced from occupied Kherson region in July 2025.

43. Starting with the 2022-2023 academic year, the Russian education curriculum replaced the Ukrainian curriculum in all schools in occupied territory, with classes taught in the Russian language. Russian narratives – justifying the war against Ukraine and glorifying Russian soldiers – were introduced, as were mandatory patriotic rituals and military-patriotic programmes, as well as cadet classes, with these practices extending into extracurricular activities beyond the classroom, and affecting children from a very early age.⁴⁹ Amendments to Russian federal educational programmes removed Ukrainian language and literature from primary and basic general education.⁵⁰ Occupying authorities removed Ukrainian textbooks and literature from schools and libraries, blocked Ukrainian educational websites and digital platforms, and required “foreign” educational institutions (including Ukrainian) to close by 1 June 2023.⁵¹ These measures deprived children of an education respectful of their individual cultural identity, language, and values, and the national values of their country, in violation of IHL and IHRL.⁵²
44. The occupying authorities enforced attendance in Russian-run schools through threats and intimidation, searching children’s mobile phones, including for Ukrainian education apps. Parents who did not enrol their children in Russian-run schools were warned of penalties, including fines, and informed that their cases would be referred to child guardianship bodies and police, placing them at risk of losing their parental rights.
45. Many parents and teachers interviewed by OHCHR who had fled occupied territory for Government-controlled territory cited these education-related policies as a primary or contributing reason for their departure. For example, a mother of four children left occupied Zaporizhzhia region in 2025 because her children were required to recite poems and sing songs glorifying the Russian Federation and justifying its invasion of Ukraine. A teacher in occupied Kherson region left her post in 2022 rather than teach the Russian curriculum and departed in 2025 because, as she stated, her “son’s education came first” and he could no longer safely access online Ukrainian classes.

⁴⁹ OHCHR, *The impact of the armed conflict and occupation on children’s rights in Ukraine*, 24 February 2022 – 31 December 2024, paras. 86-97.

⁵⁰ Russian Federation Ministry of Education, Order No. 729, at <https://minjust.consultant.ru/documents/56691>

⁵¹ Russian Federation law No. 19-FKZ, 15 February 2023, art. 4.

⁵² GC IV, art. 50; ICCPR, art. 20; CRC, art. 29(1); CESCR, art. 15(1a). The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern of “widespread and systematic State propaganda in schools about the armed conflict in Ukraine.” Concluding observations on the Russian Federation, CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7, 1 March 2024, para. 39b.

“We left so we would not be forced [by the occupation authorities] to be someone we are not.”

– A mother of two children who was displaced from occupied Kherson region in September 2023.

46. In territory of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation, references to Ukrainian culture have been removed from public spaces. This includes destruction of monuments commemorating Ukrainian history, such as the Holodomor famine of 1932–1933, removing Ukrainian literature from libraries, renaming streets, and replacing public signs. Observance of Ukrainian national holidays and commemorative dates has been restricted.
47. Restrictions on Ukrainian culture have also been extended into private and family life, including through surveillance and unannounced home visits by law enforcement officials; checks of mobile phones for pro-Ukrainian content; and restrictions on access to Ukrainian media. In some areas, satellite antennas have been replaced to allow access only to Russian television channels; access to Ukrainian websites is restricted.⁵³ The updated State Strategy for Countering Extremism of 2024 designates the expression of Ukrainian identity, including the use of Ukrainian national symbols, patriotic songs, and historical commemorations such as the Holodomor, as “extremist” activities.⁵⁴
48. IDPs from occupied territory described concealing their use of the Ukrainian language, limiting cultural practices, including religious and holiday observance, engagement with Ukrainian music, literature and other cultural content, and avoiding Ukrainian symbols and content, even in private settings. Some IDPs have reported to OHCHR that the cumulative impact of sustained pressure linked to their cultural identity and the risk of prosecution as an “extremist” for any expression of it contributed materially to their decisions to leave occupied territory for Government-controlled territory.

Legislation and policies targeting religious communities

“After what happened to me, I was sure they wouldn’t let me practice my religion or let me live in peace ... I decided to leave as soon as possible in order to survive.”

– An imam who fled occupied Kherson region in 2022 after being detained and pressured by occupying authorities.

49. Russian authorities have imposed restrictive laws and administrative requirements severely limiting the ability of members of certain religious groups in occupied territory to exercise their right to religious freedom, and in some cases criminalizing religious acts. In particular, occupying authorities have prosecuted individuals for belonging to

⁵³ OHCHR, *Russian occupation and its aftermath*, paras. 61-68; OHCHR, *Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine*, 1 June – 30 November 2025 para. 101.

⁵⁴ Presidential Decree No. 1124, paras. 6, 14, and 20-24.

Jehovah's Witnesses and imputed Hizb ut-Tahrir affiliation, religious organizations that operate freely in Ukraine but are banned under Russian law as "extremist" and "terrorist".⁵⁵

50. In addition, all public associations, including religious communities, were required to re-register in order to retain legal status, a process that could be initiated only by Russian citizens. Some religious organizations also declined to re-register due to unwillingness to comply with the Russian legislation imposed in occupied territory contrary to international humanitarian law, and thus cannot worship freely.⁵⁶
51. Local occupying authorities banned religious communities that were perceived as not cooperative. For example, in December 2022, the occupying authorities in Zaporizhzhia region banned three Protestant churches and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, accusing them of operating "in violation of Russian Federation legislation," participating in anti-Russian protests, and having links with foreign entities. In Crimea, the occupying authorities deregistered the independent Muslim organization "Alushta" in October 2024, claiming that the community had disseminated "extremist materials."⁵⁷
52. Occupying authorities also regularly harassed leaders and members of religious communities, by conducting searches of worship places and residences, confiscating religious literature and church equipment, and interrogating, detaining and in some cases deporting clergy. For example, Russian law enforcement raided a Protestant church during Sunday service in September 2022, searched the worshippers' phones and detained and interrogated the clergy. One pastor was warned he had 48 hours to leave the city and complied out of fear.
53. Several religious leaders told OHCHR that they left occupied territory for Government-controlled territory because of the pressure from the occupying authorities. Interviewees also indicated that many parishioners left because the religious communities to which they had belonged for decades could no longer conduct their activities. For example, an imam from Kherson region, who was detained, interrogated and tortured to compel him to re-register his religious organization under Russian legislation and ensure that members of his community did not participate in pro-Ukrainian protest or express pro-Ukrainian views, told OHCHR that this experience led him to fear he would not be permitted to practise his religion in peace, prompting his decision to leave occupied territory.

Legislation and policies targeting LGBTIQ+ persons

54. Russian legislation applied in occupied territory of Ukraine prohibits so-called "LGBT propaganda", effectively banning any public discussion or dissemination of information related to sexual orientation and gender identity.⁵⁸ Russian authorities have also designated the so-called "International LGBT Social Movement" an extremist organization.⁵⁹
55. OHCHR documented multiple instances where Russian armed forces and security actors harassed and intimidated individuals perceived as LGBTIQ+ during identity checks, searches, and other encounters. Personal data accessed in these interactions, including online activity, increased the risk of targeted abuse. For example, a transgender woman living in occupied territory at the start of the full-scale invasion experienced repeated sexual harassment by soldiers. In one incident, after a Russian soldier realized she was transgender, he struck her in the face twice with the stock of a rifle. She subsequently left occupied territory for territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine.
56. LGBTIQ+ persons who had fled occupied territory interviewed by OHCHR consistently described a persistent sense of vulnerability, citing risks to their safety and security if they remained in occupied territory. For example, an LGBTIQ+ human rights defender told OHCHR that she and her colleagues left occupied Kherson region because

⁵⁵ In April 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled that the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization had violated the country's legislation on combating extremism and declared its activities illegal. In 2003, Hizb ut-Tahrir was banned as a terrorist organization by a decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., OHCHR, *Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)*, para. 145.

⁵⁷ OHCHR, *Report of the human rights situation in Ukraine*, 1 September – 30 November 2024, para. 72.

⁵⁸ Russian Federation Federal Law No. 478-FZ, 5 December 2022.

⁵⁹ Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, ruling of 30 November 2023.

they understood they would face serious risks if they remained due to the systematic repression of LGBTIQ+ people and the prohibition of LGBTIQ+ organizations under Russian law.

C. Obstacles that prevent the return of displaced persons to occupied territory of Ukraine

57. The policies described above created significant obstacles to the return of those displaced from occupied territory, regardless of whether they originally fled because of coercive conditions or because of the conduct of armed hostilities. In order to return safely, all would have to comply with unlawfully imposed requirements of the occupying Power. Furthermore, the Russian Federation implemented other policies that directly prevented or discouraged displaced Ukrainians from returning to occupied territory.

Denial of entry and long-term entry bans

58. Following the closure of unofficial crossing points across the frontline in late 2022, people displaced or who have otherwise departed from occupied territory can return there only via the Russian Federation. Due to restrictions on entry to the Russian Federation for Ukrainian nationals, Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow is the sole entry point available.⁶⁰

59. Upon arrival at Sheremetyevo airport, Ukrainian citizens are subject to “filtration”, consisting of intensive security screening procedures, including in-depth searches of electronic devices, intrusive questionnaires regarding family connections and personal views on the “special military operation” in Ukraine, and interviews conducted by border guards. Filtration has frequently resulted in the denial of entry. OHCHR reviewed court records for 35 appeals by Ukrainian nationals – 20 women and 15 men – who were denied entry to the Russian Federation; in every case, the appeal was rejected based on a broad interpretation of a perceived threat to national security. For example, Ukrainians were denied entry because their cell phone contained photographs or contact details of current or former Ukrainian servicepersons or law enforcement officials, or digital communications or social media activity expressing support for Ukraine. Conversely, the absence of data on a phone was interpreted as “evidence” that the device had been “cleaned” to conceal information and also resulted in denial of entry. In one case, a renovator was denied entry because he had only 171 contacts in his phone, which was deemed suspiciously low for his profession. Russian border guards also frequently denied entry to Ukrainians who had relatives in the Ukrainian armed forces or past Ukrainian military service. Many were also issued long-term entry bans ranging from 20 to 50 years.

60. The closure of crossing points across the frontline, restriction of entry of Ukrainian citizens to the Moscow airport, and filtration practices have effectively prevented the return of protected persons displaced from occupied territory, in violation of the right of displaced persons to return voluntarily to their homes.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of October 6, 2023, No. 2723-reestablished Sheremetyevo airport and the Ludonka border crossing with Latvia as the only entry points for Ukrainians in the Russian Federation. Shortly after, Latvia closed their side of the border, leaving Sheremetyevo as the single entry point.

⁶¹ Customary IHL, Rule 132. See also: *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, principle 28. Government data shows that the number of Ukrainians entering the Russian Federation, which includes Ukrainians from occupied territory traveling to their place of origin, has steadily declined. In the first quarter of 2024, 15,554 Ukrainians crossed the border compared with 5,427 in the first quarter of 2025, a 65 per cent decrease. Statistical data at https://repository.nsedc.ru/dataset/emiss_38479 (accessed 13 January 2026).

Confiscation of residential property

"My parents spent almost all their lives there – of course they want to return one day. But they are old. The fact that some unknown people live in their apartment makes it impossible to go back and fight for it."

- A man speaking of his parents who have not returned to occupied Luhansk region since being displaced in 2022.

61. The Russian Federation implemented procedures to confiscate the private property of individuals displaced from occupied territory, of whom 95 per cent owned their homes prior to displacement.⁶² These unlawful policies⁶³ dispossess those displaced of their homes, impede their return and may have the effect of rendering their departure permanent.⁶⁴
62. From early 2024, occupying authorities began large-scale expropriation of private property, including residential property, across occupied Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia regions. Under laws on "abandoned" property adopted in March and May 2024, occupying authorities posted notices designating properties as "potentially abandoned" and requiring in-person appearance within 30 days to prove ownership and register the property within the Russian State Registry.⁶⁵ In practice, only Russian passport holders can register property in occupied territory, significantly limiting Ukrainians from protecting their ownership rights. After 30 days, occupying authorities may register the property as "abandoned", assume its use and commence judicial proceedings to transfer it to municipal ownership.
63. Since February 2022, OHCHR documented the issuance of notices designating over 38,000 apartments and houses as "potentially abandoned". The majority (over 23,000) were located in Donetsk region, nearly half (over 13,700) in Mariupol. At least 6,156 properties were registered as "abandoned", over 80 per cent in Mariupol.
64. OHCHR also documented confiscation proceedings launched absent any sign of abandonment.⁶⁶ In occupied Donetsk, a woman's apartment was labelled as "potentially abandoned" in January 2025 despite her sister residing there and utilities paid; it was registered as "abandoned" in April 2025. When the woman attempted to travel to occupied territory to assert her ownership rights, she was denied entry at Sheremetyevo airport and banned from the Russian Federation for 20 years on unspecified national security grounds.⁶⁷ A Russian court subsequently transferred the apartment to municipal ownership.
65. More recently, decrees issued on 14 March 2025 and 29 December 2025 have prohibited registration of property rights of citizens of "unfriendly foreign states" (including Ukraine) in occupied territory (except Crimea) and the processing of notary deeds based on a power of attorney for representation in real estate transactions issued by such citizens without a special permit.⁶⁸ On 15 December 2025, the Russian Federation adopted legislation allowing

⁶² UNHCR, *Intention Surveys with Refugees from Ukraine and with IDPs in Ukraine*, round 6 (July-August 2024); data shared with OHCHR.

⁶³ IHL forbids the confiscation of private property. Hague Regulations, arts. 46, 53; Customary IHL, Rule 51. See also: UDHR, art. 17(2); Pinheiro Principles, principles 5 and 10; United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, principle 21.

⁶⁴ ICTY, *Prosecutor v Brđanin*, Trial Judgment, 1 September 2004, para. 555.

⁶⁵ See OHCHR, *Treatment of prisoners of war and update on the human rights situation in Ukraine*, 1 June to 31 August 2024, para. 93; OHCHR, *Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine*, 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025, paras. 65-68.

⁶⁶ The listed criteria are failure to pay for housing and utilities for 6 months, lack of information in the Russian State Register of Real Estate, and non-use of the premises.

⁶⁷ She confirmed the ban by finding her name in an online "list of persons whose entry into the Republic of Belarus is prohibited or undesirable" maintained by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus

⁶⁸ President of the Russian Federation, Decrees No. 145 and No. 1006.

the transfer of “abandoned” property to State or municipal ownership without a court decision.⁶⁹ The law also established procedures to lease such property to Russian police and other civil servants or to local residents as social housing, or to transfer ownership to Russian citizens.

66. In Crimea, additional confiscation procedures continued after the full-scale invasion.⁷⁰ In 2024, Russian authorities reportedly ‘nationalized’ the property of 560 individuals and legal entities deemed citizens of “foreign states that commit unfriendly actions against the Russian Federation”. The properties were subsequently sold, with revenues used in part to support Russian soldiers.⁷¹
67. Taken together, these policies, which in themselves violate international humanitarian law,⁷² significantly impede as a practical reality the return of those displaced from occupied territory.⁷³ The confiscation and reallocation of residential property to secondary occupants create immediate and enduring barriers to return, particularly where property has been transferred to municipal ownership or new occupants. For example, a man interviewed by OHCHR explained how his parents miss their home in occupied territory and would like to return one day. However the fact that people are living in their apartment makes it impossible: it would be difficult for his 75-year-old father to initiate eviction proceedings and re-assert ownership. The absence of property restitution procedures - key to conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and safe and sustainable returns - entrenches this barrier.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Federal Law No. 1052810-8, at <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202512150024> (accessed 23 December 2025)

⁷⁰ OHCHR, *Ten years of occupation by the Russia Federation*, paras. 18-19; OHCHR, *Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine*, 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025, para. 72.

⁷¹ <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-krym-vlasti-rf-natsionalizirovali-imushchestvo-560-ukrainskikh-lits/33278102.html>; Official Telegram channel of Chairman of the occupation State Council of the Republic of Crimea, at https://t.me/va_konstantinov/6757

⁷² IHL forbids the confiscation of private property. Hague Regulations, arts. 46, 53; Customary IHL, Rule 51. See also: UDHR, art. 17(2); Pinheiro Principles, principles 5 and 10; United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, principle 21.

⁷³ ICTY, *Prosecutor v Brđanin*, Trial Judgment, 1 September 2004, para. 555.

⁷⁴ UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, *Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons*, 28 June 2005, E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, preamble, paras. 2.1, 2.2; GCIV 2025 Commentary, para. 3172.

VI. OBLIGATIONS OF UKRAINE TOWARD PERSONS DISPLACED FROM OCCUPIED TERRITORY



The shooting and explosions began the morning after my birthday. That morning, we left our home, and haven't returned there yet. The presents are still lying unwrapped in my room. But what's even sadder is that I'm starting to forget how my room, my yard and my city used to look. I'm starting to forget my friends' faces. I really want to go home and hug my grandparents.

– Yehor, a 10-year-old boy from Mariupol, now lives and studies in Kyiv.

68. As compared to IDPs originating from Government-controlled areas, individuals displaced from occupied territory, regardless of the reasons for their flight, face specific additional vulnerabilities and encounter additional barriers to the full exercise of their rights. They also generally have poorer ability to access essential goods and services, including accommodation, clothing, and hygiene products.⁷⁵

A. Issuance of identity and civil status documents

“You have a Russian passport. You are a Russian citizen. Go away.”

– An 18-year-old man who fled occupation to escape conscription describing what a guard at a Ukrainian Embassy in a third country said to him in January 2025.

69. Among surveyed IDPs from occupied territory, 12 per cent reported missing official documents, such as birth certificates and passports, often because they could not obtain or renew Ukrainian documents while living under occupation.⁷⁶ Many also struggled to secure civil documentation on arrival in Government-controlled territory or while in third countries attempting to enter Government-controlled territory. Records were sometimes absent from State registries, particularly non-digitalized ones, and procedures have not been adapted to take into account occupation-related constraints.

70. A young man who had lived in the self-proclaimed “Donetsk people’s republic” between 2014 and 2022 faced bureaucratic obstacles when applying for a return certificate⁷⁷ at a Ukrainian embassy in a third country in March 2025. Authorities could not verify his Ukrainian birth certificate due to lack of access to physical records and advised him to prove his birth in court. As of December 2025, he still lacked any Ukrainian identity document.

71. Ukrainian authorities have not yet implemented a simplified administrative procedure to issue certificates for births and deaths that occurred in occupied territory, even though this is provided for in principle in Ukrainian law.⁷⁸ Displaced persons must first obtain a court decision establishing the fact of birth or death, then apply to the civil status registration authorities for the certificate. NGOs providing legal assistance to IDPs reported complicated, delayed procedures, and incurred court fees.

72. OHCHR analysed 83 court decisions issued in 2022–2025 denying requests to establish a birth or death that had occurred in occupied territory. In the majority of reviewed cases, the courts failed to account for the specific context of occupation. For example, in September 2025, a court refused to establish a child’s birth in occupied Crimea because medical records cited the mother’s Russian (rather than Ukrainian) passport, without considering that Russian citizenship was automatically applied to all persons in Crimea after 2014, or that a Russian passport was necessary to access medical care. Although an appeal court later overturned the decision, the child meanwhile lacked a birth certificate, a document required for the full exercise of rights.

73. The right to be registered immediately after birth is explicitly provided in human rights treaties,⁷⁹ is linked *inter alia* to the right to identity and nationality, and is essential for the enjoyment of many other rights.

⁷⁵ IOM, General Population Survey, round 21 (July-October 2025).

⁷⁶ UNHCR, Intentions Survey among IDPs in Ukraine, round 6 (July-August 2024); data shared with OHCHR. In comparison, less than 5 per cent of IDPs from other areas have missing documents.

⁷⁷ A certificate of identity for return to Ukraine (posvidchennia na povnennia v Ukrainu) is a temporary travel document issued by Ukrainian embassies and consulates abroad, which allows citizens lacking valid passports or identification a one-time entry into Ukraine.

⁷⁸ Law No. 1207-VII, art. 9.

⁷⁹ CRC, art. 7; ICCPR, art. 24; UDHR, art. 15.

B. Rights to work and to adequate social security

“It is very embarrassing, I have two diplomas, but we feel like we are some sort of beggars!”

– A woman from occupied Luhansk region, displaced in Government-controlled territory since 2023, who had to move into a collective centre in 2025 due to inability to afford the high rent.

74. IDPs from occupied territory face additional barriers to accessing employment as compared to IDPs from Government-controlled territory due to non-recognition by Ukrainian authorities of primary or secondary education obtained from Russian-run schools operating in occupied territory. Though the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a decree to recognize higher education qualifications from institutions in occupied territory,⁸⁰ this applies only in cases where individuals were eligible to obtain the degree in the first place, which means they would have to hold secondary education credentials recognized according to Ukrainian law. As noted above, Ukraine does not recognize secondary education obtained from Russian-run schools operating in occupied territory.
75. Older IDPs faced difficulty proving their work history in occupied territory, resulting in the denial or reduction of pension payments. In some cases, pension authorities refused to recognize periods of employment due to missing documents and archives, typos in documents, and the closure of employing entities in occupied territory. In such cases, IDPs needed to provide witness testimony from two former colleagues, which was impractical or impossible since potential witnesses frequently resided in occupied territory. Those unable to prove their work history often received only minimum social pensions (less than 100 USD per month), which does not cover basic living costs.
76. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has also introduced a requirement for persons displaced from occupied territory to confirm, by 31 December 2025, that they do not receive pension payments from authorities of the Russian Federation.⁸¹ This may create an additional administrative burden in accessing pensions, depending on how information is disseminated and procedures are implemented, given the low level of digital literacy among older persons.
77. Under international human rights law, in addition to taking steps to achieve progressively their full realization, States also have immediate obligations in relation to the rights to work and to social security.⁸² Old-age benefits constitute a core component of this right, and States must ensure the availability, adequacy and accessibility of such benefits, provided without discrimination.⁸³

C. Access to an adequate standard of living and compensation for damaged, destroyed, or inaccessible housing

78. Local authorities, NGOs and IDPs have told OHCHR that the main issue for IDPs from occupied territory is access to housing. In a recent survey, 35 per cent of IDPs from occupied territory reported lack of access to adequate housing, as compared to 21 per cent of IDPs from territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine.⁸⁴ OHCHR documented the case of a family displaced from occupied territory who had been living in a collective center since December 2024. The parents, each of whom have a disability, told OHCHR that due to the lack of accessible and affordable

⁸⁰ Decree No. 831, 15 July 2025.

⁸¹ Resolution No. 299, 11 February 2025.

⁸² ICESCR, arts. 6, 9; CESCR, General Comment No. 19, paras. 4, 40.

⁸³ CESCR, General Comment No. 19, paras. 11, 15, 22-27.

⁸⁴ IOM, General Population Survey, round 21 (July-October 2025); UNHCR, Intentions Survey of IDPs in Ukraine, round 6 (July-August 2024); data shared with OHCHR.

housing, insufficient Government support, and the combined impact of their disabilities on their caregiving capacity, they felt unable to provide adequate care for their three-year-old child and had relinquished their parental rights.

79. Over half of surveyed IDPs from occupied territory reported that their original homes were damaged or destroyed (54 per cent of IDPs from occupied territory as compared to 51 per cent from frontline areas and 12 per cent from other areas).⁸⁵ Nevertheless, they do not enjoy equal access to national compensation programs for damaged or destroyed property, which could facilitate more secure settlement in their current place of residence. The law on compensation for damaged or destroyed property excludes property located in Crimea and in areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions that Ukraine has not controlled since 2014.⁸⁶ A compensation program providing funds to repair damaged housing does not apply to property located in occupied territory or to property damaged by hostilities prior to 24 February 2022.⁸⁷ A separate compensation program for destroyed housing, while not containing territorial limitations, remains inaccessible in practice to IDPs from occupied territory, as it requires on-site inspection by a local commission, which is impossible on occupied territory.⁸⁸ Although a remote inspection procedure was introduced, its use is explicitly excluded for property located in occupied territory.⁸⁹

D. Specialized support for victims of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment

“Nobody took care of me, even though they promised.”

– A man who was arbitrarily detained and ill-treated for almost three years by Russian authorities, speaking about the support received upon displacement from occupied territory in May 2025.

80. Among IDPs from occupied territory are a significant number of civilians who had been detained and subjected to torture and ill treatment by the occupying authorities, which often included sexual violence.⁹⁰ OHCHR has interviewed 278 such civilians.⁹¹ As a result of the trauma experienced, they require long-term, specialized medical, psychological and social support following their release and arrival in Government-controlled territory. At present, their specific needs are not being met, since support programs are fragmented, incomplete and available only to specific groups. Many survivors must navigate different services on their own, often without clear information or referral pathways, and may receive only short-term or partial support that does not address their full recovery needs.
81. The Government of Ukraine has established a legal framework to provide survivors of conflict-related sexual violence with urgent interim reparations, including free rehabilitation (medical, psychosocial and other measures) and one-time financial support.⁹² However, the Cabinet of Ministers has not yet adopted the bylaws necessary for its implementation, delaying the provision of needed support to survivors.
82. Another law guarantees support to some former civilian detainees, including medical and psychological care, financial support and temporary accommodation.⁹³ The eligibility criteria, which were established before the full-

⁸⁵ UNHCR, *Intentions Survey of IDPs in Ukraine, round 7 (December 2025 – January 2026)*; data shared with OHCHR.

⁸⁶ Law No. 2923-IX, 23 February 2023.

⁸⁷ Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 381, 21 April 2023.

⁸⁸ Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 600, 30 May 2023.

⁸⁹ Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 815, 7 July 2025.

⁹⁰ See OHCHR, *Treatment of civilians deprived of their liberty in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine*, 23 September 2025.

⁹¹ These civilians either fled occupied territory after being tortured or ill-treated, or were expelled by Russian authorities (see para. 29 above).

⁹² Law No. 4067-IX, 20 November 2024.

⁹³ Law No. 2010-IX, 26 January 2022. Furthermore, on 24 December 2025, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution 1775 regarding support to former civilian detainees.

scale invasion, are restrictive, requiring that applicants prove the Russian Federation deprived them of their liberty for specific reasons, such as their political opinion. A commission takes the decision on eligibility; the process is lengthy. For example, one released civilian told OHCHR that the process of establishing the fact of deprivation of liberty by the Commission lasted for seven months, during which he had to cover expenses for housing, medical treatment and rehabilitation as he was unable to access benefits provided by the law.

83. While the Russian Federation has obligations to provide reparations to victims of violations which can be attributed to it, Ukraine should, pending implementation of such measures, endeavour to establish national programmes to provide for practical forms of reparations and other assistance, according to need.⁹⁴

E. Reintegration of children and young adults from occupied territory

“They said that they have many cases like mine [people coming from occupied territory], and there will be no special treatment.”

– A young adult who left occupied Donetsk region upon turning 18 describing what she was told when applying for identity documents in spring 2025.

84. The Government of Ukraine has established a specific program of support for certain groups of displaced children, which provides for safe return, reintegration measures, and financial support.⁹⁵ However, due to a legislative patchwork, children displaced from occupied territory may qualify for different legal statuses, resulting in uncertainty and varying access to assistance.⁹⁶ Children who have been displaced from occupied territory typically require assistance with issuance of official documentation, adaptation to the Ukrainian education curriculum, and psychological support following both their experience under occupation and displacement.
85. Young adults (aged 18 to 23) displaced from occupied territory often are in a vulnerable situation and in need of additional support. They are not eligible for certain types of assistance available to children under 18, yet many lack the independence to rely solely on the limited support provided to adult IDPs. Some arrive alone, with family members remaining in occupied territory, and lack a support network in Government-controlled territory. Although measures exist to facilitate access to higher education, many described practical obstacles: low stipends; limited tuition-free slots; banking restrictions preventing receipt of funds from relatives in occupied territory; and high housing costs. A draft law under consideration proposes extending support measures available to displaced children to young adults up to age 23.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ UN 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, A/RES/60/147, paras. 15-16.

⁹⁵ Cabinet of Ministers Resolutions No. 551 (14 May 2024), No. 66 (21 January 2025), and No. 1295 (1 October 2025).

⁹⁶ See Law No. 3999-IX (8 October 2024) and Cabinet of Ministers Resolutions Nos. 268 (2017), 551 (14 May 2024), 1240 (29 October 2024), 66 (21 January 2025), 641 (4 June 2025), 653 (4 June 2025), 1295 (1 Oct 2025).

⁹⁷ Draft law No. 14251, 26 November 2025.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

86. OHCHR continues to advocate for the implementation of recommendations in its past reports, most of which remain relevant. The issues raised in this report highlight the need for further progress in protecting human rights, and in particular, in the following areas.

87. To both Ukraine and the Russian Federation:

- a) **Ensure that any peace negotiations include the meaningful consideration of the situations and interests of displaced persons, and address specifically their voluntary, safe and dignified return to places of origin in occupied territory, with full respect for their human rights and international humanitarian law; the participation of IDPs and their representatives in such discussions is encouraged;**
- b) **Establish humanitarian corridors across the contact line between occupied territory and territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine, and ensure security for those who cross;**
- c) **Facilitate video, voice and written communication between persons in occupied territory and in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine;**

88. To the Russian Federation:

- d) **Immediately, completely and unconditionally cease the use of force against Ukraine and withdraw all its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolutions ES-11/1 (2022) and ES-11/4 (2022), thereby ending the occupation of Ukrainian territory;**
- e) **Cease the implementation of all measures that compel protected persons in occupied territory to swear allegiance to the Russian Federation;**
- f) **Ensure equal access to public services, employment and freedom of movement for all protected persons residing in occupied territory regardless of their nationality and citizenship;**
- g) **Respect and protect the fundamental rights of all individuals and groups in occupied territory, including freedoms of opinion and expression, association, thought, conscience and religion, and the right to privacy;**
- h) **Restore and ensure access to education in occupied territory in accordance with the Ukrainian State curriculum, in the Ukrainian language, both in person and online;**
- i) **Protect the right of persons in occupied territory to choose and express their identity, engage in the cultural practices of their choice and use their own language;**
- j) **Cease the confiscation of private property in occupied territory, renew property rights to all owners deprived of ownership, restore property transferred to municipal ownership; and provide fair and adequate compensation where the remedy of restitution is not factually possible or when compensation in lieu of restitution is accepted knowingly and voluntarily;**
- k) **End all forms of conscription, compulsory military registration, and coercive recruitment of protected persons in occupied territory into the armed forces of the Russian Federation;**
- l) **Refrain from applying the Russian legal system in occupied territory in compliance with its obligation under international humanitarian law to respect the laws in force in the country, including by refraining from criminalizing or otherwise targeting individuals on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity in occupied territory;**

- m) **Ensure unhindered access by OHCHR to the occupied territory of Ukraine to enable first-hand monitoring and human rights protection;**

89. To Ukraine:

- n) **Review policies for IDPs to ensure that, whatever the cause of their displacement, the specific needs of persons displaced from occupied territory are adequately met, with a designated and sufficiently resourced entity responsible for coordination;**
- o) **Implement a simplified administrative procedure for registration of births and deaths occurring in occupied territory and issuance of Ukrainian documentation;**
- p) **Develop a comprehensive strategy to provide targeted support to all children and young adults arriving from occupied territory or the Russian Federation, including through adoption of draft law No. 14251 on social protection and support for children affected by the armed conflict;**
- q) **Adopt a new State strategy and implementation plan on internal displacement which takes into account the specific needs and vulnerabilities of persons displaced from occupied territory;**

90. To the international community:

- r) **Urge the Russian Federation to fulfil its obligations under IHL and IHRL in the territory under its occupation, including by enabling the safe return of persons forcibly displaced from occupied territory;**
- s) **Provide continued financial and technical assistance to the Government of Ukraine and NGOs to support programmes that restore rights and facilitate the inclusion of IDPs from occupied territory, including targeted support for children and young adults.**