



**Seventh Interim Report  
on reported violations of  
international humanitarian  
law and international human  
rights law in Ukraine**

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15 July 2025



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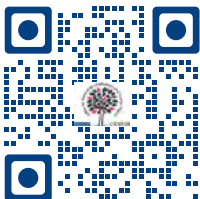
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# Executive Summary

I

1. In line with its monitoring mandate, ODIHR launched the Ukraine Monitoring Initiative (UMI) to monitor and report on the most pressing issues affecting the lives of civilians and prisoners of war (POWs), following the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. This is the Seventh Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) produced by the UMI, building on the findings and recommendations of the six previous Interim Reports.
2. The Report includes a short overview of developments in the context of the armed conflict from 1 December 2024 to 31 May 2025, while the main body of the report focuses on specific issues reported to ODIHR by 90 survivors and witnesses during two monitoring deployments conducted by ODIHR in Ukraine during the first half of 2025. The report is also informed by the UMI's remote monitoring, using open-source investigation techniques and information supplied by institutions of the Russian Federation and Ukraine and civil society organizations, among other actors, which is referenced throughout the report.
3. ODIHR's monitoring of the conduct of hostilities showed that, from 1 December 2024 to 31 May 2025, the Russian Federation continued its use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in densely populated areas in blatant disregard of IHL, including the principles of distinction and proportionality. In the six months to 31 May 2025, the number of verified civilian casualties in Ukrainian Government-controlled areas of Ukraine was over 50% higher than in the corresponding period in 2024.
4. On a much smaller scale, Ukraine also engaged in shelling and drone strikes on populated areas of Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine as well as border regions of the Russian Federation, which in some cases resulted in civilian casualties.
5. The continued advance of the Russian armed forces and intensified attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure further worsened the humanitarian situation and have triggered wider displacement from frontline communities. Sustained impediments to access continued to prevent humanitarian actors from reaching affected civilians.
6. ODIHR continued to interview survivors and received testimony from relatives and lawyers of individuals who were, or remain, arbitrarily detained or enforcedly disappeared from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. These included six recent cases, where civilians were unlawfully detained in late 2024 and early 2025. The new evidence gathered by ODIHR confirmed previously documented patterns, including the categories of people targeted, the lack of lawful grounds for detention, and the consistent denial of procedural guarantees and contact with the outside world. The Russian authorities continued to prosecute and convict civilians on trumped-up charges after prolonged arbitrary detention.

7. New information received by ODIHR confirmed its previous findings on the widespread and systematic use of torture by the Russian authorities against detained Ukrainian civilians and POWs. Ten of 14 civilian survivors of arbitrary detention and 23 of 28 Ukrainian POWs interviewed by ODIHR during the compilation of this report said that they were subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in detention. The methods and aims of the torture were similar to those previously reported to ODIHR, with survivors describing torture being inflicted to elicit information, extract confessions, punish or humiliate, or to force cooperation. Nearly all survivors described various short-term and long-term physical injuries and psychological trauma because of torture.
8. ODIHR received 23 testimonies on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) of which 21 were provided by direct survivors. For the first time, ODIHR was able to record the exact locations where the acts were reportedly perpetrated. The types of CRSV reportedly perpetrated against Ukrainian civilians and POWs remained similar to the findings of previous ODIHR Interim Reports.
9. ODIHR collected further information from witnesses regarding attempts by the Russian authorities to alter the status and character of the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine in violation of IHL, including making residents' ability to live in the occupied territories dependent on the acquisition of Russian citizenship. ODIHR also received accounts on the 2025 requirement for Ukrainians without Russian citizenship to register as foreigners and acquire a residency permit or face deportation. The imposition of the Russian Federation curriculum in schools continued. Military-patriotic education for school-aged children and pressure to join youth militias reportedly increased.
10. ODIHR continued to receive accounts on the use of judicial measures and 'deportation' to suppress real or perceived dissent by civilians in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, confirming the findings outlined in previous Interim Reports. More broadly, ODIHR received testimony on trials of Ukrainian civilians and POWs by the Russian authorities on trumped-up charges of terrorism, murder, espionage, sabotage, cruel treatment of POWs or civilians and the intentional destruction of or damage to property. In 2025, ODIHR was told of a far greater number of trials against Ukrainian civilians and POWs than previously during the armed conflict.
11. Witnesses described to ODIHR efforts by the Russian authorities to compel residents of Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine to 'cooperate' in ways that violate IHL, while at the same time risking unfair prosecution by the Ukrainian authorities under vague 'collaboration' laws. A new initiative by the Ukrainian authorities, entitled 'I want to go to my people', aimed at exchanging civilians convicted by the Ukrainian authorities of treason or collaboration for Ukrainians detained by the Russian authorities, raised further concerns.

12. ODIHR makes a series of recommendations, calling on both parties to the conflict to address the issues highlighted in this report, as well as to respect and ensure respect for IHL and IHRL. ODIHR also makes recommendations to OSCE participating States to provide redress to survivors of violations, to take steps to ensure accountability and to support and fund humanitarian assistance and the documentation of violations of IHL and IHRL by civil society.

# Introduction

II

13. More than three years on from the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine, the war continues to be marked by the widespread suffering of the civilian population and serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL).
14. The OSCE human dimension commitments emphasize that it vitally important that participating States adhere to and implement their binding IHL and IHRL obligations under international treaties,<sup>1</sup> including the Geneva Conventions.<sup>2</sup>
15. In line with its core mandate to assist OSCE participating States in the implementation of human dimension commitments,<sup>3</sup> ODIHR established the Ukraine Monitoring Initiative (UMI) immediately after the 24 February 2022 invasion by the Russian Federation and began monitoring and documenting reported violations in the context of the armed conflict, focusing on the most pressing issues affecting the lives of civilians and prisoners of war (POWs). This has included monitoring the use of means and methods of warfare prohibited under IHL; instances of wilful killings, torture and other inhumane and degrading treatment, and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); the unlawful displacement of civilians, including children; the denial of humanitarian aid; the situation POWs; and the situation in occupied territories and violations of the rules of occupation under IHL.
16. ODIHR’s analysis of the situation in Ukraine and alleged IHL and IHRL violations is informed by relevant legal provisions applicable to the armed conflict in Ukraine. ODIHR reiterates that the so-called ‘annexation’ of territories under occupation by the Russian Federation remains illegal, and such territories remain Ukrainian territory under international law. More information about the legal framework is available on ODIHR’s website.<sup>4</sup>
17. The methodology employed by the UMI was both informed by and developed for the circumstances on the ground in Ukraine. ODIHR adopts a trauma-informed approach, guided by the ‘do no harm’ principle, informed consent,

1 See [Concluding Document of Budapest](#), (Budapest 1994), CSCE, 6 December 1994, pp. 13, 35.

2 See [Concluding Document of Helsinki](#), (Helsinki 1992), CSCE, 10 July 1992, paras. 47-52; CSCE, [Budapest 1994](#), Chapter IV, Code of conduct on politico-military aspects of security, paras. 29–35.

3 CSCE, [Helsinki 1992](#). See also [Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), (First Interim Report), OSCE/ODIHR, 20 July 2022; [Second Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), (Second Interim Report), OSCE/ODIHR, 14 December 2022; [Third Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), (Third Interim Report), OSCE/ODIHR, 17 July 2023; [Fourth Interim Report on violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), (Fourth Interim Report), OSCE/ODIHR, 12 December 2023, [Fifth Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), (Fifth Interim Report), OSCE/ODIHR, 22 July 2024; [Sixth Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#) (Sixth Interim Report), OSCE/ODIHR, 13 December 2024, for additional detail on ODIHR’s mandate.

4 See [The legal framework applicable to the armed conflict in Ukraine](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 17 July 2023.

and with consideration for the risks of re-traumatization. More information about the methodology is available on ODIHR's website.<sup>5</sup>

18. This Seventh Interim Report builds upon the findings and recommendations of the six previous Interim Reports on reported violations of IHL and IHRL in Ukraine published in July 2022 (First Interim Report), December 2022 (Second Interim Report), July 2023 (Third Interim Report), December 2023 (Fourth Interim Report), July 2024 (Fifth Interim Report) and December 2024 (Sixth Interim Report) respectively.<sup>6</sup> ODIHR's public reporting aims to contribute further to ensuring accountability for violations of IHL and IHRL committed in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine.
19. The report begins with an overview of conflict-related issues and important developments which occurred in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine between 1 December 2024 and 31 May 2025. It then turns to specific issues which were detailed during in-person interviews with survivors and witnesses conducted by ODIHR in the first half of 2025, giving prominence to their voices.<sup>7</sup> ODIHR conducted two monitoring deployments to Ukraine during this period. During these visits, ODIHR interviewed 90 witnesses during a total of 85 interviews, speaking with survivors of, or witnesses to alleged violations of IHL and IHRL (49 women and 41 men).<sup>8</sup> ODIHR interviewees came from various regions of Ukraine, including Cherkasy, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Khmelnytskyi, Kyiv, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Ternopil, Volyn, Zaporizhzhia, and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (Crimea).
20. ODIHR wishes to convey its deepest gratitude to each witness and survivor who provided their testimony. Additionally, ODIHR received information from the authorities of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which is referenced throughout the report.

5 See [Ukraine Monitoring Initiative Methodology](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 17 July 2023.

6 OSCE/ODIHR, [First Interim Report](#); [Second Interim Report](#); [Third Interim Report](#); [Fourth Interim Report](#); [Fifth Interim Report](#); [Sixth Interim Report](#).

7 In this respect, certain information included in Chapter IV may relate to events that occurred before 1 December 2024.

8 As of 31 May 2025, the UMI has carried out 24 missions in and outside Ukraine, during which it has conducted 576 interviews with a total of 606 survivors of, or witnesses to alleged violations of IHL and IHRL (314 women and 292 men).



# Overview of the situation between 1 December 2024 and 31 May 2025

# III

## A. CONTINUED VIOLATIONS OF IHL DURING THE CONDUCT OF HOSTILITIES

21. ODIHR has continued to monitor reported violations of IHL committed during the conduct of hostilities, in particular relating to the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas and direct attacks against civilians and civilian objects. In the six months to 31 May 2025, the number of civilian casualties increased significantly compared to the six months to 31 May 2024. Data shows a more than 50 per cent increase in verified civilian casualties in Government-controlled areas of Ukraine between 1 December 2024 and 31 May 2025.<sup>9</sup> This is primarily due to the intensification of Russian long-range missile and loitering munitions strikes on major Ukrainian cities between March and May. Moreover, large-scale, coordinated attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure continued until mid-January, whereas smaller, localized campaigns persisted throughout the entire reporting period. Often, attacks were conducted in a manner that violated IHL norms and principles. Frontline communities remained heavily impacted by daily shelling and multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) strikes, as well as the increasing use of short-range drones. Making the same comparison, a nearly 30 per cent decrease in verified civilian casualties was observed in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>
22. ODIHR's monitoring activities, including open-source investigation techniques used to verify digital evidence,<sup>11</sup> show that the Russian armed forces continued to routinely use explosive weapons with wide area effects<sup>12</sup> in their attacks on densely populated areas of Ukraine, including those located far from the frontline.
23. Starting from March, the Russian armed forces stepped up their long-range missile and loitering munitions attacks on major Ukrainian cities.<sup>13</sup> Powerful weapons often struck residential buildings<sup>14</sup> and other civilian

9 See UN OHCHR Protection of Civilians Updates: [December 2023](#), 15 January 2025, p. 2; [January 2024](#), 7 February 2024, p. 2; [February 2024](#), 7 March 2024, p. 2; [March 2024](#), 9 April 2024, p. 2; [April 2024](#), 10 May 2024, p. 2; [May 2024](#), 7 June 2024, p. 2; [December 2024](#), 9 January 2025, p. 2; [January 2025](#), 11 February 2025, p. 2; [February 2025](#), 11 March 2025, p. 2; [March 2025](#), 9 April 2025, p. 2; [April 2025](#), 8 May 2025, p. 2; [May 2025](#), 11 June 2025, p. 2.

10 *Ibid.* OHCHR notes that the actual number might be higher as some reports are still pending confirmation.

11 As ODIHR is not positioned to conduct detailed assessments of violations of IHL norms in relation to individual attacks, its findings are based on certain patterns observed during its monitoring activities. These allow it to make provisional conclusions on the degree of compliance with certain IHL norms by the warring parties. For more information, see [ODIHR's methodology](#).

12 These are weapons designed for the open battlefield and, given their inherent inaccuracy, their use in densely populated areas is very likely to cause indiscriminate and disproportionate harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure.

13 The cities of Kryvyi Rih, Dnipro, Odesa, Kharkiv, Sumy and Zaporizhzhia, as well as the capital, Kyiv, have been repeatedly targeted by aerial attacks during the reporting period.

14 For instance, on 1 February, 14 civilians were killed (including three children), and 20 others were injured (including four children) when a missile hit a five-story residential building in Poltava, destroying one of its entrances. See Volodymyr Kohut, [Telegram post](#), 2 February 2025, in Ukrainian. On 21 March, a family of three (including a child) were killed and 16 were injured (including a child) when loitering munitions hit private residential houses in the city of Zaporizhzhia. See National Police of Ukraine, [Telegram post](#), 22 March 2025, in Ukrainian; Ivan Fedorov, [Telegram post](#), 22 March 2025, in Ukrainian.

infrastructure,<sup>15</sup> including functioning medical facilities,<sup>16</sup> killing and injuring civilians.<sup>17</sup> Many of these attacks raise concerns about respect for the principle of proportionality and the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks under IHL.<sup>18</sup>

24. For instance, on 4 April, a Russian ballistic missile was launched at a residential neighbourhood in the city of Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovsk region), detonating over a playground, a restaurant and nearby apartment buildings. As a result of the attack, 20 civilians were killed (including nine children) and 75 were injured (including 12 children),<sup>19</sup> making it the deadliest single attack on children in the more than three-year armed conflict. Following analysis of photographs and videos, as well as eye-witness statements and other publicly available evidence, ODIHR has reasonable grounds to believe that, contrary to the Russian Federation's claims, there were no military objectives in the area immediately prior to or at the time of the strike.<sup>20</sup> Based on the available information, it appears that the Russian armed forces hit the residential area in blatant disregard of the core IHL principle of distinction and the related strict prohibition of indiscriminate attacks. Deliberate attacks on civilians or civilian objects are war crimes under international law.<sup>21</sup>
25. On the morning of 13 April, two Russian ballistic missiles struck the historic centre of Sumy several minutes apart. The first missile hit the Congress Centre of Sumy State University,<sup>22</sup> while the second struck the university's Educational and Scientific Institute of Business, Economics and Management. The attack killed at

15 For instance, on 5 March, a loitering munition struck 'Tsentralnyi' hotel in Kryvyi Rih, killing six civilians and injuring 32. See Serhiy Lysak, Telegram [post](#), 6 March 2025, in Ukrainian. On 31 January, seven civilians were injured in a missile attack that damaged a hotel building in the historical district of Odesa. See Office of the Prosecutor General, Telegram [post](#), 31 January 2025, in Ukrainian.

16 These include the 10 December missile attack on the city of Zaporizhzhia, during which two medical facilities were hit, and which killed 11 civilians (including four medical workers) and injured 20 more. See State Emergency Service of Ukraine, Telegram [post](#), 12 December 2024, in Ukrainian. See also information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

17 According to updated figures made available by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human rights (UN OHCHR), more than 93 per cent of civilian deaths and injuries in Ukraine recorded between 24 February 2022 and 31 May 2025 were caused by explosive weapons with a wide impact area. This includes shelling from heavy artillery and MLRS, as well as missiles and air strikes. See UN OHCHR Protection of Civilians Update: [May 2025](#), 11 June 2025, p. 3.

18 ICRC Customary IHL (CIHL) Rules 1, 7, 11, 12 and 14; AP I, arts. 51(4) and 51(5)(b).

19 Oleksandr Vilkul, Telegram [post](#), 6 April 2025, in Ukrainian; Oleksandr Vilkul, Telegram [post](#), 6 April 2025, in Ukrainian; Serhiy Lysak, Telegram [post](#), 5 April 2025, in Ukrainian; See also UN OHCHR Protection of Civilians Update: [April 2025](#), 8 May 2025, p. 2.

20 The Russian Federation took responsibility for the attack, saying it was "a precision strike with a high-explosive missile on the site of a meeting with the commanders of formations and Western instructors in one of the restaurants in Kryvyi Rih" and that the attack killed "up to 85 service people and damaged up to 20 vehicles." See Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 4 April 2025, in Russian.

21 CIHL Rule 11; AP I, arts. 48, 51(4), 85(3)(a) and (5); ICC Statute, arts. 8(2)(b)(i) and (ii).

22 According to media reports, the Congress Centre has been frequently used for children's educational events in Sumy and, less than an hour after the attack, a performance for children was to be held there. See BBC News, Russian Service, Telegram [post](#), 13 April 2025, in Russian; UNIAN, Telegram [post](#), 13 April 2025, in Russian.

least 31 civilians (including two children) and injured 105 (including 14 children).<sup>23</sup> This makes it the deadliest attack on civilians in Ukraine in 2025 and one of the largest attacks by number of casualties (killed and injured) in nearly two years.<sup>24</sup> The Russian Federation took responsibility for the attack, claiming it had killed more than 60 Ukrainian servicemen present at a meeting.<sup>25</sup> As the first strike appeared to be targeted at a legitimate military target,<sup>26</sup> Ukraine should have, to the extent feasible, avoided locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas.<sup>27</sup> Russian forces nonetheless failed in their requirement to take all feasible precautions to avoid loss of civilian life and damage to civilian objects. Based on the extensive harm caused to civilians resulting from the use of an explosive weapon with wide area effects in a densely populated area, the timing of the attack<sup>28</sup> and the apparent lack of warnings, the Russian Federation failed to comply with the IHL principles of proportionality and precautions, which may amount to a war crime.<sup>29</sup>

26. Furthermore, from the end of April through May, the Russian armed forces conducted several large-scale, coordinated missile and loitering munitions attacks targeting multiple regions of Ukraine, including the capital, Kyiv. These include the 24 April attack targeting Kyiv City and at least eight other regions of the country. In Kyiv alone, 13 civilians were killed (including one child) and 87 were injured (including 10 children) when one of the missiles directly struck a two-story residential building, destroying it completely.<sup>30</sup> On the night of 25 May, the Russian Federation conducted one of the largest coordinated attacks on Ukraine since February 2022,<sup>31</sup> launching at least 367 missiles and loitering munitions against 13 regions of the country.<sup>32</sup> According to the Ukrainian authorities,<sup>33</sup> at least 12 civilians (including three children) were killed, and more than 60 were injured (including nine children) across the country. Similar attacks were launched on the nights of 24 and 26 May, killing

23 Many civilians were killed in the street while attempting to help the victims of the first strike or while travelling in a bus near the impact zone. See UN OHCHR Protection of Civilians Update: [April 2025](#), 8 May 2025, p. 2.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 14 April 2025, in Russian.

26 At the time of the strike, a ceremony was taking place in the Congress Centre to honour servicemen from the 117th Territorial Defence Brigade of the Ukrainian armed forces, marking the anniversary of the unit's formation. While the military ceremony was reportedly held in the basement of the Congress Centre and its participants were not harmed during the initial missile strike, ODIHR established that the attack resulted in the death of two Ukrainian servicemen.

27 See CIHL Rule 23; AP I, art. 58.

28 The attack occurred on Palm Sunday, a Christian Orthodox holiday when many Ukrainians go to church.

29 CIHL Rules 14, 15, 20; AP I, arts. 51(4)-(5), 57(2), 85(3)(b) and (5); ICC Statute, art. 8(2)(b)(iv).

30 See State Emergency Service of Ukraine, Telegram [post](#), 25 April 2025, in Ukrainian; Timur Tkachenko, Telegram [post](#), 28 April 2025, in Ukrainian.

31 The Russian Ministry of Defence reported that the massive strike on Ukraine was carried out with "high-precision weapons" at enterprises producing "missile components, radio electronics, explosives, rocket fuel and strike unmanned aerial vehicles" for the Ukrainian Armed Forces, as well as at "radio-technical intelligence and satellite communications centres." See Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 25 May 2025, in Russian.

32 Airforce of the Armed forces of Ukraine, Telegram [post](#), 25 May 2025, in Ukrainian; State Emergency Service of Ukraine, Telegram [post](#), 25 May 2025, in Ukrainian.

33 Ihor Klymenko, Telegram [post](#), 25 May 2025, in Ukrainian.

and injuring civilians and hitting residential buildings and other civilian infrastructure.<sup>34</sup>

27. Attacks also continued unabated near the frontline,<sup>35</sup> with Donetsk region most heavily impacted due to continued advances by the Russian armed forces. In addition, the border communities of Kharkiv and Sumy regions were subjected to repeated shelling and airstrikes.<sup>36</sup> Over the reporting period, ODIHR also observed a significant increase in both the frequency and severity of attacks with short-range loitering munitions, including so-called first-person-view (FPV) drones.<sup>37</sup> According to the UN OHCHR, from December through February, these short-range drones caused the highest number of casualties, exceeding the impact of any other weapon.<sup>38</sup> While the majority of attacks involving FPV drones were reportedly in frontline settlements of Kherson region,<sup>39</sup> some struck deeper into Ukrainian territory. For instance, on 23 April, local authorities reported that a short-range drone hit a bus that was transporting employees of a mining and processing plant in Marhanets (Dnipropetrovsk region), killing nine civilians (including eight women) and injuring 58.<sup>40</sup>
28. In December and January, the Russian armed forces continued their large-scale, coordinated strikes against Ukraine's energy infrastructure,<sup>41</sup> launching three waves of attacks on 13, 25 December and 15 January. These attacks damaged over a dozen energy infrastructure facilities, including hydroelectric and thermal power plants, in nine regions of Ukraine.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Russian

34 In the absence of all the facts and circumstances surrounding each attack it is difficult to make an individual assessment of their lawfulness at this stage. However, the high number of casualties among the civilian population and the extent of the damage to civilian infrastructure, together with the choice to use explosive weapons with wide-area effects, seem to suggest that, even if in some cases the attacks may have been directed at legitimate military targets, the Russian Federation failed to respect the core IHL principles of proportionality and precautions in attacks which may amount to war crimes.

35 Such attacks, among others, continued to affect humanitarian personnel, rescue and healthcare workers, highlighting a trend of their increased targeting since the beginning of 2024. For more details, see Section III.b. **The humanitarian situation**. See also OSCE/ODIHR [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 24; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 26, 34.

36 For instance, on 4 February, six civilians were killed and 55 were injured (including three children) in a missile strike on an administrative building in the centre of Izium (Kharkiv region). See Oleh Syniehubov, Telegram [post](#), 4 February 2025, in Ukrainian. On 24 March, an attack on a residential neighbourhood of the city of Sumy killed one civilian and injured over 100 (including 22 children). See Sumy City Council, Telegram [post](#), 26 March 2025, in Ukrainian; Artem Kobzar, Telegram [post](#), 2 April 2025, in Ukrainian. On 17 May, nine civilians were killed and seven were injured when a drone struck a minibus carrying civilian evacuees near the town of Bilopillia (Sumy region). See Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Telegram [post](#), 17 May 2025, in Ukrainian.

37 FPV drones are equipped with cameras that provide operators on the ground with a direct, real-time view of the areas they fly over and potential targets. This feature allows operators to assess with greater certainty whether a potential target is a military objective or a civilian person or object.

38 UN OHCHR Protection of Civilians Update: [February 2025](#), 11 March 2025, p. 1.

39 *Ibid.* According to the UN OHCHR, short-range drones accounted for 63 per cent of the casualties in Kherson region. See also "[They are hunting us](#)": [systematic drone attacks targeting civilians in Kherson](#), UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/59/CRP.2, 28 May 2025.

40 Serhiy Lysak, Telegram [post](#), 23 April 2025, in Ukrainian; Serhiy Lysak, Telegram [post](#), 25 April 2025, in Ukrainian.

41 During the previous reporting period, ODIHR recorded at least six waves of large-scale, coordinated attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure. See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 27.

42 Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

forces also hit gas production, transportation and storage facilities in three regions of the country.<sup>43</sup> The attacks resulted in civilian deaths and injury,<sup>44</sup> caused emergency power outages in several regions, and saw daily scheduled power cuts reinstated across the country.<sup>45</sup> From February through April, the Russian Federation frequently launched smaller, local attacks on energy facilities, including during the formal announcement of a limited 30-day ceasefire agreement.<sup>46</sup> For instance, between 11 and 25 February, Russian forces carried out at least five attacks on energy infrastructure in southern regions of Mykolaiv, Kherson and Odesa that led thousands to experience outages of heating and electricity during the coldest days of winter.<sup>47</sup> In early March, energy infrastructure in Odesa region was attacked for five consecutive days, and, in April, Russian forces conducted at least six attacks on power generation, transmission and distribution facilities in Kherson region.<sup>48</sup> In addition, since late January, port infrastructure facilities have frequently been targeted in Odesa region, resulting in civilian casualties and causing damage to other civilian infrastructure, including cultural sites.<sup>49</sup>

29. ODIHR documented an attack that occurred in Russian-occupied territory which resulted in high numbers of civilian casualties. In the afternoon of 26 November, artillery shells struck a bus stationed at a bus stop in Nova Kakhovka (Kherson region), killing at least three civilians (all women) and injuring at least ten (including eight women).<sup>50</sup> ODIHR spoke with two survivors of the attack; civilians who sustained severe injuries and who,

43 *Ibid.*

44 For instance, following the 25 December attack, one civilian was killed in Dnipropetrovsk region and six were injured in Kharkiv region. See Serhiy Lysak, Telegram [post](#), 25 December 2024, in Ukrainian; Oleh Syniehubov, Telegram [post](#), 25 December 2024, in Ukrainian.

45 Oleksiy Kuleba, Telegram [post](#), 25 December 2025, in Ukrainian.

46 On 18 March, Ukraine and Russia verbally agreed not to target each other's energy infrastructure for 30 days. See [Vladimir Putin agrees to 30-day halt to attacks on Ukraine's energy grid](#), *The Guardian*, 19 March 2025. ODIHR online monitoring showed that, despite the agreement, the Ukrainian armed forces also targeted Russia's energy infrastructure on several occasions. For instance, on 19 March, Ukrainian forces reportedly hit an oil depot in Stanitsa Kavkazskaya (Krasnodar Krai) using loitering munitions, with the fire burning for several days. See [A fire at an oil depot in Kuban was localized on an area of 1,250 square meters](#), *m.*, *Izvestiya*, 24 March 2025. On 25 March, a loitering munitions attack on a power facility of the 'Kurskenergo' branch of Russian energy company 'Rosseti' caused a shutdown of several substations in Kursk region, leaving more than 4,000 consumers in Khomutovsky district without power supply. See [Более 4 тыс. жителей Курской области остались без электричества из-за атаки БПЛА](#) [More than 4,000 residents of Kursk region were left without electricity due to a UAV attack], *TASS*, 26 March 2025, in Russian; [Что известно об атаках украинских БПЛА на энергообъекты в российских регионах](#) [What we know about Ukrainian UAV attacks on energy facilities in Russian regions], *TASS*, 26 March 2025, in Russian.

47 See German Galushchenko, Facebook [post](#), 11 February 2025, in Ukrainian; Suspilne Kherson, Telegram [post](#), 24 February 2025, in Ukrainian; UNIAN, Telegram [post](#), 16 February 2025, in Russian; Gennadiy Trukhanov, Telegram [post](#), 19 February 2025, in Ukrainian.

48 UN OHCHR Protection of Civilians Updates: [March 2025](#), 9 April 2025, p. 1; [April 2025](#), 8 May 2025, p. 1.

49 Prosecutor General's Office, Telegram [post](#), 31 January 2025, in Ukrainian; Oleh Kiper, Telegram [post](#), 13 February 2025, in Ukrainian; Prosecutor General's Office, Telegram [post](#), 5 March 2025, in Ukrainian; Prosecutor General's Office, Telegram [post](#), 12 March 2025, in Ukrainian; Oleh Kiper, Telegram [post](#), 23 May 2025, in Ukrainian.

50 UN OHCHR Protection of Civilians Update: [November 2024](#), 10 December 2024, p. 2. According to the occupation authorities of Kherson region, four people were killed and 17 more were injured in this strike. See Vladimir Saldo, Telegram [post](#), 26 November 2024, in Russian.

together with relatives that died from the strike, were taking the bus home.<sup>51</sup> One witness recalled seeing four Russian soldiers next to a shop located about 25 metres from the bus stop, who may have been the target of the attack.<sup>52</sup> The Russian authorities blamed the Ukrainian armed forces for the attack.<sup>53</sup> However, ODIHR is unable to attribute the attack at the current time. Based on the number of civilian casualties resulting from the attack and the type of weapon reportedly used, ODIHR's initial assessment suggests that the attack violated the IHL principles of proportionality and precautions, which may amount to a war crime.<sup>54</sup>

30. Although on a much smaller scale to Russian attacks, the Ukrainian armed forces have also engaged in shelling and loitering munitions strikes on densely populated areas in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, resulting in civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects. For instance, the Russian authorities reported that, on 20 January, two civilians were killed and 25 were injured as a result of an MLRS strike in the village of Bekhtery (Kherson region).<sup>55</sup> On 9 March, an artillery strike on the market in the village of Velyki Kopani (Kherson region) reportedly killed six civilians (including a child) and injured eight more.<sup>56</sup> On 24 March, the Russian authorities reported six civilians killed (including three media workers) and two injured after a missile attack on the village of Mykhailivka (Luhansk region).<sup>57</sup>
31. The Russian authorities continued to report civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure resulting from shelling and loitering munition strikes launched by the Ukrainian armed forces into the territory of the Russian Federation, and in particular its border regions of Belgorod, Kursk and Bryansk.<sup>58</sup> During the reporting period, the Ukrainian armed forces also launched several massive attacks using long-range loitering munitions.

51 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.534; UKR.WS.566.

52 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.566, paras. 22-23.

53 Vladimir Saldo, Telegram [post](#), 26 November 2024, in Russian.

54 CIHL Rules 14, 15; AP I, arts. 51(4)-(5), 57(2), 85(3)(b) and (5); ICC Statute, art. 8(2)(b)(iv).

55 Vladimir Saldo, Telegram [post](#), 20 January 2025, in Russian. ODIHR has neither been able to verify the numbers reported, nor could it ascertain the exact circumstances of the attack.

56 Vladimir Saldo, Telegram [post](#), 10 March 2025, in Russian. ODIHR has not yet been able to independently verify the reported number of civilian casualties.

57 Leonid Pasechik, Telegram [post](#), 24 March 2025, in Russian. ODIHR is still verifying the circumstances of the attack and the reported number of casualties.

58 For instance, on 25 December, four civilians were reportedly killed and five were injured, and three residential buildings were damaged in the shelling of the town of Lgov (Kursk region). See Aleksand Khinstein, Telegram [post](#), 25 December 2024, in Russian. On 29 January, a two-year-old child and his mother were killed while another child and the children's father were injured after a drone attack on a private residential property in the village of Razumnoye (Bryansk region). See Vyacheslav Gladkov, Telegram [post](#), 29 January 2025, in Russian. In addition, on 1 February 2025, six civilians were killed and four were injured in a strike on a senior care facility reportedly housing 95 elderly and bedridden patients in the town of Sudzha (Kursk region), which was under the control of Ukrainian forces at the time of the attack. While both Ukraine and the Russian Federation blamed each other for the attack, ODIHR is currently unable to attribute it to either party to the conflict. See *Важные Истории* [Important stories], Telegram [post](#), 5 February 2025, in Russian; Air Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Telegram [post](#), 1 February 2025, in Ukrainian; Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 1 February 2025, in Russian. It should be noted that ODIHR has not yet been able to verify these and similar reports from the Russian Federation in the manner set out in its [methodology](#).

For instance, on 11 March, a large loitering munitions attack was launched at several Russian regions,<sup>59</sup> including Moscow.<sup>60</sup> As a result, three civilians were killed in Moscow region, with 18 more reportedly injured (including three children) and several residential buildings hit.<sup>61</sup> In addition, in the late evening of 31 May, an explosion occurred on a road bridge near Vygonichi village (Bryansk region) just as a civilian truck was driving over it and a passenger train was passing underneath. The bridge structure and the truck collapsed directly onto the locomotive, causing it to derail. The Russian authorities reported that seven civilians were killed and 118 were injured.<sup>62</sup> The incident was followed by two other bombings of logistics infrastructure which took place on 1 June.<sup>63</sup> The Russian authorities accused Ukraine of carrying out the attacks.<sup>64</sup> Ukraine has not officially commented on the attacks, which violated IHL principles.<sup>65</sup>

## B. THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

32. The continued advance of the Russian armed forces and intensified attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure had a devastating impact on the daily lives of people in Ukraine. These attacks have further worsened the humanitarian situation<sup>66</sup> and have triggered wider displacement from

59 The General Staff of the Ukrainian armed forces said that Ukrainian drones hit production facilities of the Moscow oil refinery in Kapotnya and reported explosions near the ‘Steel Horse’ line-production dispatch station in Oryol region. See General Staff of the Ukrainian armed forces, Telegram [post](#), 11 March 2025, in Ukrainian.

60 Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 11 March 2025, in Russian; Sergey Sobyenin, Telegram [post](#), 11 March 2025, in Russian.

61 Andrey Vorobiev, Telegram [post](#), 11 March 2025, in Russian; RBK News, Telegram [post](#), 11 March 2025, in Russian; Maria Lvova-Belova, Telegram [post](#), 11 March 2025, in Russian. See also Andrey Vorobiev, Telegram [post](#), 11 March 2025, in Russian.

62 Information provided to ODIHR by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation.

63 One occurred at a railway bridge in Kursk region as a freight train was crossing it, causing the locomotive to fall onto an empty road beneath the bridge, and injuring the train driver and two of his assistants; and another occurred on a railway line between Unecha and Zhecha stations in Bryansk region. See Aleksandr Khinshtein, Telegram [post](#), 1 June 2025, in Russian; [The damage to the track was discovered during an inspection of the Unecha – Zhecha section in the Bryansk region](#), *Izvestiya*, 1 June 2025.

64 The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation opened a criminal case under Article 205 of the Criminal Code for an “act of terrorism”. See Investigative Committee, Telegram [post](#), 3 June 2025, in Russian. See also [Бастрыкин: теракты в Брянской и Курской областях спланированы спецслужбами Киева](#) [Bastrykin: Terrorist attacks in Bryansk and Kursk regions planned by Kyiv’s special services], *TASS*, 4 June 2025, in Russian. AP I, art. 52(2) indicates how attacks can only be launched against military objectives.

65 While bridges are generally considered civilian objects, logistical infrastructure is often used for both civilian and military purposes, making them so-called ‘dual-use’ objects. To the extent that a specific dual-use object makes an ‘effective contribution’ to the enemy’s military action and to which its partial or total destruction offers a definite military advantage, it qualifies as a military objective and a legitimate target regardless of its simultaneous civilian use. If the attack was indeed carried out by Ukraine, then it nevertheless violated the IHL principles of proportionality and precautions, given the high number of civilian casualties resulting from it and apparent lack of warnings.

66 Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna. See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Interim Report](#), paras. 62-67; [Second Interim Report](#), paras. 74-91; [Third Interim Report](#), paras. 4, 18, 21; [Fourth Interim Report](#), paras. 4, 30-32; [Fifth Interim Report](#), paras. 22-23; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 33-35.

frontline communities, particularly Donetsk, Kharkiv and Sumy regions, which continue to be subjected to frequent shelling.<sup>67</sup>

33. The pattern of hostilities affecting humanitarian personnel and their operations appears largely unchanged.<sup>68</sup> ODIHR's open-source monitoring continued to record incidents in which humanitarian activities were disrupted or suspended due to fighting,<sup>69</sup> leaving civilians without critical assistance. At the same time, humanitarian access to populations near the front line was increasingly constrained by the expanded use of FPV drones.<sup>70</sup> In the Russian-occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, sustained impediments to access continued to prevent humanitarian actors from reaching affected people.<sup>71</sup> Deliberate disruption of humanitarian relief efforts may constitute a violation of IHL obligations to facilitate relief.<sup>72</sup>
34. Some incidents raised further concerns about apparent efforts by Russian forces to direct attacks against evacuees and those involved in facilitating such evacuations.<sup>73</sup> For instance, in Kherson region, sources suggest that the Russian armed forces intentionally disrupted evacuations, including by deploying leaf mines and spike traps on evacuation routes.<sup>74</sup> These incidents reflect a deeply concerning pattern, particularly in the absence of humanitarian corridors.
35. Consistent with previous reports, ODIHR was informed about civilians in frontline communities whose homes were destroyed<sup>75</sup> or where they were

67 For more details, see Section III.a. **Continued violations of IHL during the conduct of hostilities.**

68 See also OSCE/ODIHR, *Sixth Interim Report*, paras. 33-35.

69 For instance, see *Російські війська обстріляли рятувальників ДСНС під час доставки води мирним жителям Костянтинівки* [Russian forces shelled State Emergency Service rescuers while they were delivering water to civilians in Kostyantynivka], State Emergency Service of Ukraine, 17 February 2025, in Ukrainian; Vadim Filashkin, Telegram [post](#), 17 February 2025, in Ukrainian; Ukrainian Red Cross, Facebook [post](#), 31 January 2025, in Ukrainian; *The humanitarian mission of ADRA Ukraine and the UN WFP was subjected to a drone attack in the Kherson region*, ADRA Ukraine, 16 May 2025.

70 *Ukraine: Humanitarian Access Snapshot (March – April 2025)*, UN OCHA, 8 May 2025. See also ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.514, para. 67.

71 “Bombs do not stop, trauma does not subside,” in *Ukraine, OCHA tells Security Council*, UN OCHA, 29 May 2025.

72 CIHL Rule 55; GC IV, art. 23; AP I, art. 70.

73 See *Британському волонтеру, який потрапив під російський обстріл у Покровську разом з ГО “База UA”, ампутували ліву ногу і руку* [British volunteer who came under Russian shelling in Pokrovsk with the NGO ‘Base UA’ had his left leg and arm amputated], ZMINA, 3 February 2025, in Ukrainian; Humanitarian Mission ‘Proliska’, Facebook [post](#), 19 February 2025, in Ukrainian; *Deliberate Attack on Humanitarian Evacuation Vehicle on Easter Sunday*, Joint statement from Proliska and Protect Humanitarians, 20 April 2025.

74 See Roman Mrochko, Telegram [post](#), 18 December 2024, in Ukrainian; *Евакуація з “червоної зони” на Херсонщині: як працюють волонтери ГО “Сильні Бо Вільні”* [Evacuation from the ‘red zone’ in the Kherson region: how volunteers of the NGO ‘Strong Because Free’ work], Суспільне Херсон [Suspilne Kherson], 8 April 2025, in Ukrainian; *“Якомога далі від цього пекла”: із Херсона, ризикуючи життям, волонтери евакуюють цивільних* [“As far away from this hell as possible”: volunteers risk their lives to evacuate civilians from Kherson], FREEDOM, 27 April 2025, in Ukrainian.

75 Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna. According to the Ukrainian authorities, Russian Federation forces have damaged or destroyed almost 200,000 residences since 24 February 2022.

left without objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.<sup>76</sup> One elderly witness, whose home was damaged and who evacuated from the frontline in Kherson region in December 2024, recounted how she endured two months without access to water, gas or electricity.<sup>77</sup> She recalled “*when it got cold, it was impossible to stay*” and explained that persistent threats of and attacks by drones had made repairs to damaged infrastructure impossible and evacuations difficult and dangerous.<sup>78</sup>

36. ODIHR’s monitoring revealed concerning patterns that align with the recent findings of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, which suggest that concerted efforts by Russian forces to make conditions unliveable in Kherson region and thereby force civilians to flee amount to the crime against humanity of forcible transfer of population.<sup>79</sup>
37. General conditions of hardship have continued to compound and have a profound impact on daily civilian life, disproportionately affecting children and other vulnerable groups. For instance, as of December 2024, over 10 per cent of educational facilities across Ukraine were damaged or destroyed.<sup>80</sup> Not only is the quality of education reduced but, due to the need to rely on remote learning options, children’s mental and social well-being is also impacted.<sup>81</sup> A witness employed in a school in Kyiv outlined how “*the biggest issue is the psychological condition of the students*”, indicating “[t]here is traumatization from the war”.<sup>82</sup> The witness also observed a decline in students’ academic performance, citing sleep deprivation and the unavailability at her school of a shelter in which teaching can continue during aerial alarms.<sup>83</sup>
38. The first half of 2025 saw NGOs active in the humanitarian sector confronted with a sharp and sudden decline in funding. Several Ukrainian NGOs had to suspend operations or close.<sup>84</sup> The reduced funding also impacted human rights monitoring and the documentation of alleged war crimes. Several Ukrainian NGOs who spoke to ODIHR highlighted significant negative consequences due to recent budget cuts.<sup>85</sup> These included a reduction in the scope of documentation and downsizing of human resources. Likewise, one Russian NGO assisting Ukrainian POWs and detained civilians explained how

76 Objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population cannot be made the object of an attack. Humanitarian relief personnel and objects must, furthermore, be respected and protected. See CIHL Rules 7, 31, 32, 53, 54; AP I, arts. 54(2), 71(2); ICC Statute, art. 8(2)(b)(iii) and (xxv).

77 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.514, para. 15.

78 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.514, paras. 11, 63, 67, 77.

79 “They are hunting us”: systematic drone attacks targeting civilians in Kherson, UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/HRC/59/CRP.2, 28 May 2025, para. 57.

80 *Ukraine – Fourth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA4): February 2022 – December 2024*, the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Union, the United Nations, February 2025, p. 23.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 100. Over 5.6 million requests for psychological support from students were recorded in the 2023/2024 academic year alone.

82 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.542, para. 19.

83 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.542, para. 21.

84 See *Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025*, UN OCHA, April 2025, p. A2.

85 Information provided to ODIHR by six NGOs working on human rights and humanitarian law issues.

severe funding cuts and the loss of domestic opportunities for crowdsourcing had heavily impacted their operations.<sup>86</sup> ODIHR is concerned that these developments threaten the provision of humanitarian assistance and essential IHL and IHRL monitoring and accountability programmes on the ground.

### C. OTHER SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS

39. The scale and frequency of POW exchanges have increased, and a regularized prisoner exchange mechanism has now emerged as one of the few sustained channels of engagement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. During the reporting period, the Ukrainian and Russian Federation authorities reported six such exchanges, totalling more than 2,500 POWs.<sup>87</sup> The release of 1,000 POWs from each side, as agreed on in Istanbul and conducted between 23-25 May 2025, represents the largest exchange to date.<sup>88</sup> Since February 2022, a total of 5,757 Ukrainian POWs have been reported released through negotiations and exchanges,<sup>89</sup> with an additional 536 individuals returning outside the formal exchange framework.<sup>90</sup>
40. Whereas exchanges primarily concern military personnel, civilians have regularly been included. For instance, in the initial round of exchanges following the May meeting between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in Istanbul, approximately 270 POWs were swapped alongside an estimated 120 civilians.<sup>91</sup> Although the possibility of concluding agreements by which civilian internees are exchanged implicitly exists,<sup>92</sup> any such exchange would presuppose that the underlying detention of the civilians in question was lawful (i.e., detained as a measure of last resort for imperative security

86 Information provided to ODIHR by an NGO defending the rights of Ukrainian civilian detainees and POWs imprisoned in the Russian Federation.

87 Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Telegram [post](#), 30 December 2024, in Russian; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Telegram [post](#), 30 December 2024, in Ukrainian; Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 5 February, 2025, in Russian; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Telegram [post](#), 19 March 2025, in Ukrainian; Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 19 March 2025, in Russian; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, X [post](#), 21 March 2025, in Ukrainian; Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Facebook [post](#), 19 April 2025, in Ukrainian; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, X [post](#), 19 April 2025, in Ukrainian; Dmytro Lubinets, Facebook [post](#), 19 April 2025, in Ukrainian; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Telegram [post](#), 6 May 2025, in Ukrainian; Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 6 May, 2025, in Russian.

88 Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Telegram [post](#), 23 May 2025, in Ukrainian; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Telegram [post](#), 24 May 2025, in Ukrainian; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Telegram [post](#), 25 May 2025, in Ukrainian; Russian Ministry of Defence, Telegram [post](#), 25 May 2025, in Russian; [Турция резервирует за собой роль посредника](#) [Türkiye reserves role of mediator], *Kommersant*, 26 May 2026, in Russian.

89 Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Facebook [post](#), 26 May 2025, in Ukrainian. ODIHR is unable to include figures on POW exchanges from the Russian Federation, as this information has neither been made public nor has it been provided to ODIHR by the Russian authorities.

90 From February 2022 through May 2025, Ukraine and the Russian Federation exchanged an average of 148 prisoners per month. See also [Chaos to Coordination: The Evolution of POW Swaps in the Russia-Ukraine War](#), *The Kyiv Independent*, 23 May 2025.

91 [Ukraine and Russia take part in biggest prisoner swap since 2022 invasion](#), BBC, 23 May 2025.

92 GC IV, art. 132 (encouraging parties to a conflict to conclude agreements for the release and repatriation of certain classes of vulnerable internees).

reasons).<sup>93</sup> ODIHR interviewed two civilians who were arbitrarily detained and released as part of a POW exchange.<sup>94</sup> The detention of civilians who do not pose an imperative security threat would be tantamount to hostage-taking, which is prohibited under IHL.<sup>95</sup>

41. Notwithstanding increased cooperation on POW exchanges, ODIHR has also observed an apparent rise in hateful rhetoric towards Ukrainian military personnel, especially POWs or those people *hors de combat*.<sup>96</sup> The continued use of dehumanizing language with slurs propagating the message that Russian Federation armed forces “*are not fighting [...] humans*” and the designation of enemy combatants in Kursk as terrorists appear to be used to justify the unlawful treatment of POWs.<sup>97</sup> This kind of rhetoric seems to further normalize treatment that contravenes the Geneva Conventions.
42. The incursion of the Ukrainian armed forces into the Kursk region of the Russian Federation in August 2024 triggered significant displacement of civilians and necessitated evacuations from areas near hostilities.<sup>98</sup> Some civilians were reported to have been displaced to Ukraine.<sup>99</sup> ODIHR is currently unable to independently verify the status of these individuals, the circumstances surrounding their displacement, nor the obstacles to their return to the Russian Federation.
43. During the reporting period, several videos were posted online apparently depicting the execution of individuals *hors de combat* by the Russian armed forces.<sup>100</sup> The first such video, circulated online on 23 February, purports to show a Ukrainian soldier being shot at point-blank range by unidentified Russian soldiers in Kursk region.<sup>101</sup> A second video, from 12 March, depicts at least five Ukrainian soldiers, being tortured and killed at a village near Sudzha (Kursk region).<sup>102</sup> According to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, criminal investigations into alleged executions of Ukrainian POWs have risen

93 See GC IV, arts. 42, 78.

94 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.520, para. 45; UKR.WS.546, para. 42.

95 CIHL Rule 96; GC IV, arts. 34, 147; AP I, art. 75; ICC Statute, art. 8(2)(a)(viii).

96 See [The language of war: Russia, BBC Global Jigsaw](#), 21 December 2024; [Мы воюем не с людьми. Как события в Курской области доказали, что СВО была необходима](#) [We are not fighting with humans. How events in Kursk region proved that the SMO was necessary], [Донецкое агентство новостей](#) [Donetsk News Agency], 13 March 2025, in Russian.

97 [Ibid.](#); [Visit to a command post of the Kursk group of forces](#), President of Russia, 12 March 2025; [Александр Хинштейн: ВСУ не просто покинут Курскую область, а сбегут](#) [Alexander Khinshtein: The Ukrainian Armed Forces will not just leave Kursk region, they will flee], TASS, 15 March 2025, in Russian. See also [Мирошник: иностранные наемники отличились особыми зверствами в Курской области](#) [Miroshnik: Foreign mercenaries distinguished themselves with particular atrocities in Kursk region], TASS, 17 March 2025, in Russian.

98 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 35.

99 Information provided to ODIHR by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation.

100 ODIHR has not been able to independently verify or geolocate the videos. Preliminary analysis, however, indicates no observable signs of manipulation and suggests that the footage exhibits all hallmarks of authenticity. ODIHR nevertheless remains unable to attribute the conduct observed to either party of the conflict.

101 [Jūsu Informācijas Mākonis](#) [Your Information Cloud], Telegram [post](#), 23 February 2025, in Ukrainian.

102 [Slavyansky Rubezh](#) [Slavic Frontier], Telegram [post](#), 12 March 2025, in Russian.

annually, with eight incidents reported in 2022 (57 POWs), eight in 2023 (11 POWs), 39 in 2024 (149 POWs) and 20 in 2025 to date (51 POWs).<sup>103</sup>

44. The Russian Federation authorities accused the Ukrainian armed forces of killing civilians in several villages in Kursk region during the period of Ukraine's occupation.<sup>104</sup> In particular, on 31 January, Russia's Investigative Committee claimed to have established the involvement of Ukrainian servicemen in the murder of 22 civilians and the rape of eight women in Russkoye Porechnoye village.<sup>105</sup> The Committee later reported that two of the suspected Ukrainian soldiers had been detained.<sup>106</sup> Some Russian media questioned the evidence made public by the Russian authorities.<sup>107</sup> The number and exact circumstances of the deaths also remained unclear.<sup>108</sup> Ukraine's Centre for Countering Disinformation dismissed the claims.<sup>109</sup> ODIHR was unable to independently verify these claims.

103 Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Facebook [post](#), 23 May 2025, in Ukrainian.

104 Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, Telegram [post](#), 19 January 2025, in Russian; [СК возбудил дело по факту убийства боевиками ВФУ двух жителей курских Погребков](#) [The Investigative Committee has opened a case into the murder of two residents of Pogrebki, Kursk region, by militants of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.], *Izvestiya*, 7 March 2025, in Russian; [СК завел дело о теракте после убийства ВСУ мирных жителей в Черкасском Поречном](#) [The Investigative Committee opened a case on terrorism after the Ukrainian Armed Forces killed civilians in Cherkasskoye Porechnoye], *Tass*, 12 March 2025, in Russian; [Устанавливаются обстоятельства убийств мирных жителей села Махновка Курской области, совершенных украинскими боевиками](#) [The circumstances surrounding the murders of civilians in the village of Makhnovka in Kursk region, committed by Ukrainian militants, are being established.], Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation news item, 10 April 2025, in Russian.

105 Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, Telegram [post](#), 31 January 2025, in Russian.

106 [Установлен ряд военнослужащих ВСУ, причастных к убийству мирных жителей в селе Русское Поречное Курской области](#) [A number of Ukrainian Armed Forces servicemen involved in the killing of civilians in the village of Russkoye Porechnoe in Kursk region have been identified], Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, 31 January 2025, in Russian; Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, Telegram [Post](#), 4 February 2025, in Russian.

107 [Буча по-русски. Рассказ о том, как власти пытаются убедить россиян в «зверствах ВСУ»](#) [Russian-style Bucha. A story about how the authorities are trying to convince Russians of the "atrocities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces"], *Proyekt [Project]*, 6 March 2025, in Russian.

108 *Agentstvo [Agency]*, Telegram [post](#), 15 March 2025, in Russian.

109 Centre for Countering Disinformation, Telegram [post](#), 31 January 2025, in Ukrainian.



**Specific issues  
described by  
witnesses and  
survivors**

**IV**

## A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN AREAS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES

45. ODIHR continued to document cases of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, including enforced disappearances, in the Russian-controlled territories of Ukraine. Between 1 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, ODIHR interviewed 14 survivors of arbitrary detention, including eight men and six women.<sup>110</sup> In addition, ODIHR obtained 24 accounts from relatives and lawyers of individuals who were or remain deprived of their liberty by the Russian authorities.<sup>111</sup> Additional, credible allegations of similar violations perpetrated against other individuals were provided by those released from detention.<sup>112</sup> While most detentions reported by witnesses occurred in 2022 and 2023, ODIHR also documented six more recent cases, when civilians were unlawfully arrested in late 2024 and early 2025 in the occupied regions of Kherson, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and in Crimea, attesting to the continuing practice by the Russian authorities. ODIHR considers all the cases of detention it assessed to be arbitrary and therefore unlawful.
46. Consistent with previous findings,<sup>113</sup> the detention of civilians lacked lawful grounds in most new cases reported to ODIHR. Also consistent with previous findings, the Russian authorities appear to have targeted individuals for any form of real or perceived support for the Ukrainian armed forces,<sup>114</sup> for being formerly associated with or having relatives serving in Ukrainian forces,<sup>115</sup> or for holding pro-Ukrainian views.<sup>116</sup> Three witnesses explained that the Russian authorities arrested civilians in an attempt to pressure relatives who

110 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493; UKR.WS.496; UKR.WS.520; UKR.WS.535; UKR.WS.536; UKR.WS.543; UKR.WS.546; UKR.WS.550; UKR.WS.552; UKR.WS.556; UKR.WS.566; UKR.WS.570; UKR.WS.574.

111 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493; UKR.WS.497; UKR.WS.503; UKR.WS.504; UKR.WS.511; UKR.WS.521; UKR.WS.528; UKR.WS.530; UKR.WS.531; UKR.WS.532; UKR.WS.533; UKR.WS.537; UKR.WS.541; UKR.WS.545; UKR.WS.549; UKR.WS.554; UKR.WS.560; UKR.WS.562; UKR.WS.563; UKR.WS.567; UKR.WS.570; UKR.WS.572; UKR.WS.575; UKR.WS.576.

112 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 56; UKR.WS.496, para. 37; UKR.WS.536, para. 45; UKR.WS.543, para. 10; UKR.WS.550, paras. 5, 13; UKR.WS.552, paras. 14-15, 38; UKR.WS.557, para. 25; UKR.WS.566, paras. 151-153, 167-169; UKR.WS.570, paras. 21, 25; UKR.WS.574, paras. 32-33, 43, 75-78. See also UKR.WS.511, para. 17; UKR.WS.528, para. 45; UKR.WS.530, paras. 36-37, 40.

113 See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Third Interim Report](#), paras. 42-43; [Fourth Interim Report](#), paras. 43-44, [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 34; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 41.

114 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 20; UKR.WS.520, paras. 5-13; UKR.WS.536, paras. 9, 12, 14; UKR.WS.546, para. 25; UKR.WS.556, paras. 10, 12; UKR.WS.566, para. 134; UKR.WS.570, paras. 5, 9, 11. See also UKR.WS.528, para. 46; UKR.WS.530, paras. 20, 30; UKR.WS.531, paras. 4-6; UKR.WS.560, paras. 6-8, 11, 14, 59. Although in some of the reported cases witnesses said that the victims were involved in gathering information or otherwise assisted Ukrainian forces, which may constitute lawful grounds for detention, ODIHR believes that the strict conditions for the internment of civilians provided by IHL and IHRL, which require such measure to be exceptional and temporary, were not met, rendering such detentions unlawful and arbitrary.

115 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 5; UKR.WS.497, para. 10; UKR.WS.511, paras. 13-15; UKR.WS.532, para. 21; UKR.WS.533, paras. 21, 39; UKR.WS.562, paras. 15-16, 19; UKR.WS.566, paras. 137-138, 144-146, 160; UKR.WS.574, paras. 32-33; UKR.WS.563, paras. 4, 6, 8; UKR.WS.576, para. 10.

116 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 7, 11, 16-17; UKR.WS.550, para. 4; UKR.WS.552, para. 25. See also UKR.WS.493, paras. 11-13; UKR.WS.503, paras. 19-20; UKR.WS.528, para. 47; UKR.WS.537, paras. 6, 15; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.554, para. 5; UKR.WS.572, para. 21; UKR.WS.575, paras. 12-13, 19. For more details, see Section IV.e.iii. **Suppression of dissent.**

were already detained.<sup>117</sup> A female survivor of 10 months of arbitrary detention noted: *“I suspected that they had detained me as leverage over my husband, with a promise to be lenient to me in return for a confession.”*<sup>118</sup>

47. Continuing the trend observed by ODIHR in its sixth report,<sup>119</sup> most victims were kept in official places of detention, such as police stations, pre-trial detention facilities and prisons, rather than unofficial detention facilities.<sup>120</sup> Some reported being held in improvised detention facilities, usually for a short period immediately after their arrest.<sup>121</sup> Frequently, the Russian authorities transferred victims between detention facilities in the occupied areas of Ukraine or to the Russian Federation.<sup>122</sup> Survivors of all locations testified to harsh detention conditions and/or being subjected to torture and ill-treatment.<sup>123</sup>
48. New evidence collected by ODIHR shows that the Russian authorities continued to violate procedural guarantees for the confinement of civilians. The majority of victims were never informed about the concrete grounds for their detention, nor formally charged with any offence.<sup>124</sup> Consequently, they had no opportunity to challenge their detention either at the initial stage or thereafter, while the Russian authorities did not conduct any periodic, regular review of the legality of their detention.<sup>125</sup> The right to legal representation was also often withheld.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, in some of the reported cases, the Russian authorities wrongfully and unlawfully classified detained civilians as POWs.<sup>127</sup>

117 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 25-26; UKR.WS.503, para. 23; UKR.WS.570, para. 24.

118 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.570, para. 24.

119 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 43.

120 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 23, 25; UKR.WS.496, paras. 5, 12, 32-33; UKR.WS.520, para. 21; UKR.WS.536, paras. 8, 19, 23; UKR.WS.543, paras. 16, 29, 35; UKR.WS.546, paras. 9, 13, 19; UKR.WS.551, para. 27; UKR.WS.566, para. 142; UKR.WS.570, para. 13. See also UKR.WS.493, paras. 17, 27; UKR.WS.497, paras. 21-22; UKR.WS.503, para. 16; UKR.WS.511, para. 15; UKR.WS.528, para. 26; UKR.WS.531, para. 15; UKR.WS.533, para. 20; UKR.WS.543, para. 10; UKR.WS.560, para. 16.

121 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.550, paras. 4, 10; UKR.WS.556, paras. 10, 12; UKR.WS.566, para. 134; UKR.WS.574, para. 34. See also UKR.WS.503, para. 23; UKR.WS.530, para. 11; UKR.WS.532, para. 27; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.554, paras. 6, 9; UKR.WS.576, para. 14.

122 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.520, para. 11; UKR.WS.543, para. 12; UKR.WS.546, paras. 9, 13-14, 16, 19. See also UKR.WS.493, para. 45; UKR.WS.497, para. 12; UKR.WS.503, para. 15; UKR.WS.504, para. 30; UKR.WS.511, paras. 15-18; UKR.WS.521, paras. 5-6; UKR.WS.528, paras. 32, 34; UKR.WS.530, paras. 10, 12, 15-16, 30, 32; UKR.WS.532, paras. 40, 45, 50; UKR.WS.533, para. 31; UKR.WS.537, paras. 28, 34; UKR.WS.541, paras. 16, 25, 33; UKR.WS.560, paras. 28-30; UKR.WS.562, paras. 24, 36-38; UKR.WS.567, para. 13; UKR.WS.572, paras. 69-70, 74, 83; UKR.WS.576, paras. 15, 18, 26-27.

123 See also Section IV.b. **Torture and ill-treatment in areas under the control of the Russian authorities.**

124 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 16, 32; UKR.WS.496, para. 13; UKR.WS.520, para. 29; UKR.WS.535, para. 5; UKR.WS.536, paras. 31-32; UKR.WS.543, para. 12; UKR.WS.546, paras. 25, 45; UKR.WS.566, para. 134; UKR.WS.570, paras. 12, 22, 24. See also UKR.WS.503, paras. 18-20; UKR.WS.531, para. 34; UKR.WS.562, paras. 45-46; UKR.WS.563, para. 18; UKR.WS.572, para. 18; UKR.WS.575, paras. 9, 11; UKR.WS.576, para. 10.

125 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 42-43; UKR.WS.536, para. 33. See also UKR.WS.497, paras. 19-20; UKR.WS.530, para. 45; UKR.WS.562, paras. 34, 37.

126 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.552, para. 33; UKR.WS.570, para. 28; UKR.WS.566, para. 179. See also UKR.WS.532, para. 47; UKR.WS.541, para. 39; UKR.WS.554, para. 9; UKR.WS.562, paras. 45-46.

127 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.520, paras. 5-7, 9, 13; UKR.WS.546, paras. 8, 9, 25-26. See also UKR.WS.493, para. 43; UKR.WS.497, paras. 17, 25-26; UKR.WS.532, para. 56; UKR.WS.562, paras. 31, 49-51; UKR.WS.570, para. 21.

49. A female survivor, who was detained at a police station in occupied Kherson region, described to ODIHR how, after repeatedly asking guards to submit a request to the police chief about why she and her cellmates were being held in custody, it became apparent that their detention was not registered with the police and no charges had been filed. The official response noted that they “were under the responsibility of the FSB and only the FSB could decide [their] fate”. In a desperate attempt to get answers, the survivor described going on a 10-day hunger strike. After seven months of arbitrary detention, Federal Security Service (FSB) officers told her she was “*a victim of circumstances*” and released her.<sup>128</sup>
50. As observed during earlier ODIHR monitoring,<sup>129</sup> civilian detainees were often denied contact with the outside world.<sup>130</sup> In seven documented cases, civilians were held *incommunicado* for part or all their period of detention.<sup>131</sup> A civilian who was arbitrarily detained for almost three years told ODIHR “*During all my time in detention, I was never allowed to contact my relatives. I never got a single letter from my relatives. I heard from other [POW detainees] that they were taken to a room to call relatives. Once I was also taken to this room to make a call, but then someone mentioned that I was a civilian, and I was sent back to my cell.*”<sup>132</sup> Seven civilians had been unlawfully detained for prolonged periods of time, with the longest reported period being 34 months.<sup>133</sup>
51. As observed in previous Interim Reports,<sup>134</sup> four survivors of arbitrary detention explained that, in order to be released, they had to sign a paper promising to cooperate with the Russian authorities or to participate in staged videos while reading out self-incriminating statements.<sup>135</sup> One survivor also said that the Russian authorities demanded a bribe in exchange for her liberation.<sup>136</sup> Two survivors recounted how they were forced to make written statements positing the absence of any complaints related to their arrest and treatment during detention.<sup>137</sup> In one documented case, a survivor of arbitrary detention was twice sentenced to administrative arrest and a fine on fabricated charges of violating curfew. As a result, in early 2025, she was deported to

128 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.536, paras. 33, 38, 43.

129 See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 39; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 44.

130 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 13, 39; UKR.WS.520, para. 43; UKR.WS.536, para. 21; UKR.WS.543, para. 14; UKR.WS.546, paras. 26-27; UKR.WS.566, para. 180; UKR.WS.570, para. 28. See also UKR.WS.497, para. 13; UKR.WS.530, paras. 13, 38; UKR.WS.532, para. 49; UKR.WS.533, para. 28; UKR.WS.537, para. 23; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.554, para. 9; UKR.WS.562, paras. 45, 59-60; UKR.WS.567, paras. 4, 9.

131 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 13, 38; UKR.WS.546, para. 26; UKR.WS.570, para. 28. See also UKR.WS.562, para. 32; UKR.WS.572, para. 72; UKR.WS.575, para. 18; UKR.WS.576, para. 15.

132 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.546, para. 26.

133 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 5, 9 (8.5 months); UKR.WS.520, para. 11 (5 months); UKR.WS.536, paras. 4, 43 (7 months); UKR.WS.543, para. 12 (13.5 months); UKR.WS.546, paras. 4, 42 (34 months); UKR.WS.570, para. 15 (10 months). See also UKR.WS.531, paras. 7, 34 (8 months).

134 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Fourth Interim Report](#), para. 54; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 47.

135 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, para. 45; UKR.WS.556, para. 13; UKR.WS.566, para. 181; UKR.WS.570, para. 26.

136 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.536, para. 34.

137 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.536, para. 44; UKR.WS.570, para. 26.

Georgia from the occupied territory and banned from returning there for more than 40 years.<sup>138</sup>

52. Furthermore, ODIHR spoke to relatives and lawyers of 25 civilians who were still detained or ‘disappeared’ by the Russian authorities at the time of the interviews.<sup>139</sup> Twelve of them had been arbitrarily arrested during the first year of the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine.<sup>140</sup> Witnesses indicated that four of the victims were minors at the time of their arbitrary arrest.<sup>141</sup>
53. Witnesses were frequently uninformed about the fact of, or the reasons for the detention of family members. The mother of one victim told ODIHR *“I called everyone I knew and contacted people I did not know. I was playing ‘detective’ looking for my son for three months. I placed my son’s photo in various locations in [a village in occupied Kharkiv region]. A woman reached out to me, stating that she witnessed two Russian soldiers taking my son away...”*<sup>142</sup> Moreover, the Russian authorities often refused altogether to admit to detention or to disclose information about the detainee(s)’ fate or their whereabouts. Witnesses noted that, after making multiple inquiries about individuals who were believed to be detained, they either received no response or received replies (often months later) that contained contradictory, vague or incomplete information.<sup>143</sup>
54. Ten witnesses said that the only information they were able to obtain about the whereabouts or fate of their relatives was from released POWs or civilians, or through lawyers and others who assisted in the search.<sup>144</sup> Witnesses recounted to ODIHR the extraordinary efforts undertaken to find information about their missing relatives, including hiring lawyers, travelling to different locations within occupied territories, the Russian Federation or Belarus, and appealing to various international organizations, NGOs, and the Ukrainian authorities.<sup>145</sup> Witnesses stated that the frequent transfers of detainees between facilities in

138 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.552, paras. 25, 28, 30, 34-35, 39-40.

139 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 53; UKR.WS.497, paras. 9, 23; UKR.WS.503, para. 16; UKR.WS.504, para. 28; UKR.WS.511, paras. 15, 18; UKR.WS.521, paras. 5, 7; UKR.WS.528, para. 41; UKR.WS.530, paras. 8, 32; UKR.WS.532, para. 59; UKR.WS.533, paras. 37-38, 45-46; UKR.WS.537, para. 4; UKR.WS.541, para. 34; UKR.WS.549, paras. 31, 37; UKR.WS.554, para. 11; UKR.WS.560, para. 64; UKR.WS.562, para. 71; UKR.WS.563, para. 20; UKR.WS.567, para. 4; UKR.WS.570, para. 29; UKR.WS.572, para. 103; UKR.WS.575, paras. 18, 22; UKR.WS.576, para. 26.

140 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.497, para. 9; UKR.WS.511, para. 15; UKR.WS.521, para. 5; UKR.WS.530, paras. 8, 30; UKR.WS.532, paras. 12, 24; UKR.WS.533, paras. 19, 22; UKR.WS.537, paras. 11-12; UKR.WS.541, paras. 12, 14; UKR.WS.560, para. 15; UKR.WS.562, paras. 9, 13, 19; UKR.WS.570, para. 9.

141 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.504, para. 28; UKR.WS.572, para. 63.

142 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.532, paras. 22, 24.

143 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 44, 46; UKR.WS.496, para. 46; UKR.WS.497, para. 15; UKR.WS.528, paras. 24-30; UKR.WS.531, paras. 14-15, 19; UKR.WS.532, paras. 26-27, 33-34, 37-40; UKR.WS.533, paras. 22-25; UKR.WS.541, para. 23; UKR.WS.554, paras. 10-11; UKR.WS.562, paras. 42-43, 54; UKR.WS.563, para. 18; UKR.WS.575, paras. 9, 11. See also UKR.WS.497, para. 24; UKR.WS.530, para. 25. ODIHR was able to analyse responses to inquiries from families by various entities of the Russian Federation.

144 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 45, 51-53; UKR.WS.497, para. 14; UKR.WS.511, para. 17; UKR.WS.521, paras. 7, 9; UKR.WS.528, paras. 28-29; UKR.WS.532, para. 45; UKR.WS.541, paras. 16, 20, 33; UKR.WS.554, paras. 6, 11-12; UKR.WS.560, paras. 29-31; UKR.WS.562, paras. 35, 38, 67.

145 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.497, paras. 13, 16-17; UKR.WS.532, paras. 22-24, 32-38; UKR.WS.541, paras. 7-8, 19, 34; UKR.WS.560, para. 63; UKR.WS.562, paras. 44, 47, 52-53, 66-69; UKR.WS.563, para. 18.

the occupied areas or the Russian Federation made locating them even more complicated.

55. Finally, ODIHR collected additional information on the practice of criminal prosecution and conviction of civilians on fabricated charges following arbitrary detention.<sup>146</sup> According to witness testimonies, 14 victims of arbitrary detention were charged with or already convicted of criminal offences, including ‘terrorism’, ‘espionage’ and ‘treason’.<sup>147</sup> Witnesses further reported that detained civilians have been denied fundamental fair trial guarantees in criminal prosecutions.<sup>148</sup>
56. Based on the newly obtained witness accounts and those analysed in previous reports, ODIHR concludes that the Russian Federation arbitrarily detained, including through enforced disappearances, large numbers of civilian men and women of various ages and professions in all areas of Ukraine that came under its control, both during the initial and protracted phases of the occupation, indicating violations of a widespread and systematic nature that amount to crimes against humanity. Ukrainian civilians subjected to arbitrary deprivation of liberty should be immediately and unconditionally released.

## **B. TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT IN AREAS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES**

57. ODIHR received evidence of the widespread and systematic use of torture by the Russian authorities against civilians in their custody.<sup>149</sup> During the first half of 2025, ODIHR interviewed 12 survivors of torture and ill-treatment (nine men and three women)<sup>150</sup> and received 18 accounts of credible allegations of such violations from relatives and lawyers of individuals who were or remain arbitrarily detained by the Russian authorities.<sup>151</sup> Newly reported cases were committed in both official and improvised places of detention in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine, including in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions and in Crimea, as well as in the Russian Federation.

146 See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 41; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 50.

147 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.503, paras. 43-46; UKR.WS.504, paras. 28, 51; UKR.WS.511, paras. 15-18; UKR.WS.521, paras. 5-6; UKR.WS.528, paras. 29, 41, 52; UKR.WS.530, paras. 20, 22-24, 30-33; UKR.WS.532, paras. 40, 45, 53; UKR.WS.533, para.32, 41-42, 44; UKR.WS.537, paras. 22, 26; UKR.WS.549, para. 15; UKR.WS.560, paras. 28, 32-33, 56-57, 64; UKR.WS.567, paras. 4, 15; UKR.WS.572, paras. 51, 74, 76, 103, 111; UKR.WS.576, paras. 19-20, 25, 30-31. See also UKR.WS.496, paras. 42-43; UKR.WS.528, paras. 32-34.

148 For more details, see Section IV.f. **Trials of Ukrainian civilians and POWs by the Russian authorities.**

149 See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Third Interim Report](#), paras. 55-64; [Fourth Interim Report](#), paras. 56-66; [Fifth Interim Report](#), paras. 42-51; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 52-65.

150 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496; UKR.WS.520; UKR.WS.531; UKR.WS.535; UKR.WS.536; UKR.WS.543; UKR.WS.546; UKR.WS.550; UKR.WS.551; UKR.WS.566 (two victims); UKR.WS.574.

151 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 18-19; UKR.WS.503, paras. 22-27, 38; UKR.WS.504, para. 30; UKR.WS.511, paras. 15-17; UKR.WS.521, para. 5; UKR.WS.530, paras. 11-13, 16-18, 29, 35-36; UKR.WS.531, paras. 16, 47-49; UKR.WS.532, paras. 57-58; UKR.WS.533, paras. 37, 43; UKR.WS.536, paras. 56-58; UKR.WS.537, para. 24; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.554, para. 9; UKR.WS.560, paras. 15, 17-18; UKR.WS.562, paras. 40-41; UKR.WS.572, paras. 12-13; UKR.WS.574, para. 75; UKR.WS.576, para. 29.

58. In line with its earlier findings,<sup>152</sup> new evidence collected by ODIHR indicates that torture was routinely used during interrogations with the aim of extracting information or confessions.<sup>153</sup> Perpetrators forced victims to admit to purported cooperation with the Ukrainian armed forces or authorities, or coerced them into providing information about individuals who might be of ‘interest’ to them, including detained relatives. Likewise, torture was used to punish, intimidate or humiliate the victims,<sup>154</sup> or to force them to cooperate.<sup>155</sup> Survivors identified perpetrators of torture as members of the Russian armed forces, the FSB and the Russian Investigative Committee, as well as regular personnel and special purpose units (‘Spetsnaz’) of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN).<sup>156</sup>
59. Survivors and witnesses reported perpetrators inflicting severe physical and mental pain and suffering upon their victims. Nearly all survivors and witnesses reported severe beatings, including with various objects and tools.<sup>157</sup> Six survivors and eleven witnesses said that the Russian authorities administered electric shocks during interrogation.<sup>158</sup> Other methods of torture described by victims included suffocation, hooding, starvation, stress positions for long periods, mock executions, pulling nails and solitary confinement for extended periods of time,<sup>159</sup> as well as threats of death, mutilation and physical violence or threats of harm to family members.<sup>160</sup> Witnesses also reported being subjected to and/or threatened with sexual violence against themselves and their families.<sup>161</sup> Eight survivors reported various short- and long-term physical injuries and conditions as a result of torture, including

152 See OSCE/ODIHR, *Third Interim Report*, para. 56; *Fourth Interim Report*, para. 58; *Fifth Interim report*, para. 44; *Sixth Interim Report*, para. 54.

153 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 14, 16-17, 19; UKR.WS.520, para. 43; UKR.WS.531, paras. 20-21; UKR.WS.535, paras. 7-9; UKR.WS.536, paras. 13-14; UKR.WS.543, para. 10; UKR.WS.550, paras. 11-12, 18; UKR.WS.551, para. 23; UKR.WS.566, paras. 144-146, 159-160; UKR.WS.574, para. 33. See also UKR.WS.503, paras. 23-25; UKR.WS.530, paras. 12, 44; UKR.WS.536, paras. 11-12.

154 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.520, paras. 15, 38, 41, 44-45; UKR.WS.536, paras. 19, 26; UKR.WS.543, paras. 13, 16; UKR.WS.546, paras. 20, 29, 33; UKR.WS.550, para. 4. See also UKR.WS.530, para. 14.

155 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.550, paras. 16-17. See also UKR.WS.530, para. 16.

156 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 15, 18; UKR.WS.543, para. 16; UKR.WS.546, paras. 38-39, 41; UKR.WS.550, paras. 4, 10-11, 16; UKR.WS.551, para. 23; UKR.WS.556, para. 10; UKR.WS.566, paras. 143-144, 158; UKR.WS.574, para. 38.

157 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 12, 18, 21; UKR.WS.520, paras. 38-39, 41; UKR.WS.531, para. 21; UKR.WS.543, paras. 13, 16; UKR.WS.546, paras. 13, 20-21, 23, 33, 37-38, 41; UKR.WS.550, paras. 4, 10, 12, 18; UKR.WS.574, paras. 54-55; UKR.WS.551, paras. 23-24; UKR.WS.566, paras. 144-145, 148. See also UKR.WS.493, paras. 18-19; UKR.WS.521, paras. 5, 7; UKR.WS.530, paras. 11-13, 17; UKR.WS.531, paras. 16, 49; UKR.WS.532, para. 59; UKR.WS.533, paras. 37, 43; UKR.WS.535, para. 7; UKR.WS.537, para. 24; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.560, paras. 41, 44; UKR.WS.562, para. 40; UKR.WS.576, para. 20.

158 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, para. 14; UKR.WS.520, para. 43; UKR.WS.546, para. 29; UKR.WS.550, para. 18; UKR.WS.566, paras. 146-148. See also UKR.WS.503, para. 23; UKR.WS.521, para. 5; UKR.WS.530, paras. 11-13; UKR.WS.531, paras. 16, 47-48; UKR.WS.533, para. 43; UKR.WS.535, para. 7; UKR.WS.536, paras. 13-14; UKR.WS.537, para. 24; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.560, para. 18; UKR.WS.576, para. 20.

159 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 10, 15, 18; UKR.WS.520, para. 21; UKR.WS.537, para. 24; UKR.WS.543, paras. 10, 13; UKR.WS.546, paras. 21, 23-24, 33; UKR.WS.550, paras. 12, 18; See also UKR.WS.572, para. 72.

160 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, para. 19; UKR.WS.520, para. 44; UKR.WS.530, paras. 12, 36; UKR.WS.536, para. 17; UKR.WS.543, para. 13; UKR.WS.550, paras. 4, 16; UKR.WS.566, para. 159. See also UKR.WS.521, para. 7.

161 For more details, see Section IV.d. **Conflict-related sexual violence.**

scars, bruises, burns, abrasions and blisters, broken ribs, torn muscles, back and head injuries, myocardial infraction, gynaecological trauma and shortness of breath.<sup>162</sup>

60. According to witness accounts, to coerce confessions or extract information from their victims, the Russian authorities sometimes tortured relatives in their presence or led them to believe that loved ones were being subjected to violence.<sup>163</sup> A female survivor of torture, whose son and husband were detained along with her, told ODIHR that, during interrogations, she was forced to listen to the electrocution of her son and was threatened with his murder or rape.<sup>164</sup> Another survivor recounted how *“[t]here was also a women’s cell on the ground floor [...] The trick they used to make the men talk was that they said their wives or girlfriends or mothers were arrested and kept in this women’s cell, and if they refused to cooperate and provide information, then their loved ones would be raped or wounded or have their limbs and fingers cut off [...] Once I was called in for interrogation. Then they beat one of the women in the cell and I heard her screaming and they told me it was my girlfriend.”*<sup>165</sup> All the survivors of torture also witnessed other detainees, both civilian and POWs, being tortured or physically abused.<sup>166</sup>
61. ODIHR furthermore received testimonies regarding routine violence incorporated into the administration of detention facilities operated by the Russian authorities.<sup>167</sup> Speaking about the detention regime, one survivor recalled that, during each inspection of the cell, which took place four times a day, he and his inmates were required to go out into the corridor with their hands behind their backs and their bodies bent forward. They were then made to stand facing the wall while being searched. If anyone failed to spread their legs wide enough, the guards would beat them on the legs.<sup>168</sup> Another witness, who was serving a sentence in a penal colony in Kherson region before the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine, said that, after the facility came under Russian control, he was routinely subjected to physical violence and threats, and was forced to perform hard, physical labour without any compensation.<sup>169</sup>

162 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 12, 53; UKR.WS.520, para. 39; UKR.WS.531, para. 22; UKR.WS.536, paras. 14-16; UKR.WS.543, para. 16; UKR.WS.546, paras. 38, 41; UKR.WS.550, para. 18; UKR.WS.574, paras. 55, 58, 61-62. See also UKR.WS.493, paras. 20, 29; UKR.WS.503, paras. 24, 26.

163 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.503, para. 23; UKR.WS.536, para. 11; UKR.WS.566, paras. 168-170.

164 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.536, paras. 11, 17.

165 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.566, paras. 168-170.

166 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 22, 28-29; UKR.WS.520, paras. 23, 41, 43, 47; UKR.WS.543, para. 16; UKR.WS.546, paras. 29, 41, 44; UKR.WS.550, paras. 4, 15; UKR.WS.551, para. 24; UKR.WS.566, paras. 154-155, 163, 170; UKR.WS.570, paras. 21, 25; UKR.WS.574, paras. 40, 44-46, 51. See also Section IV.c. **The situation of prisoners of war.**

167 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.520, paras. 39, 41; UKR.WS.543, para. 16; UKR.WS.546, paras. 21, 34; UKR.WS.551, paras. 10-12, 23-25.

168 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.543, para. 16.

169 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.551, paras. 10-12, 23-25.

62. Survivors interviewed by ODIHR also reported the use of humiliating practices and ‘rituals’ during which detainees were abused and ridiculed.<sup>170</sup> A survivor described one of the practices he was subjected to during short walks outside. *“I was required to show the guards if I knew all the physical exercises that inmates were supposed to know. Once I tried to tell them that I couldn’t squat properly due to an injury on my legs from beatings, but they would not listen and would just beat me again.”*<sup>171</sup> Certain ‘rituals’ were specifically aimed at insulting the national, patriotic feelings that detained civilians might have, or their Ukrainian origin itself. For instance, detainees were forced to memorize and recite the Russian national anthem or shout slogans glorifying Russia; those who failed to comply with these demands were beaten or punished.<sup>172</sup> One survivor noted how he was beaten every time he pronounced certain Russian words with a Ukrainian accent.<sup>173</sup>
63. In addition to the detention treatment regime to which civilian detainees were subjected by the Russian authorities, ODIHR continued to receive reports of widespread deplorable detention conditions that amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.<sup>174</sup> These include overcrowded cells, the absence of proper ventilation and light, unhygienic conditions, including a lack of basic sanitation, insufficient water and food, and an inability to walk or exercise.<sup>175</sup> Four survivors reported losing dangerous amounts of weight due to poor nutrition in detention.<sup>176</sup> One survivor recalled that he lost so much weight that the guards placed bets on *“how long [he] would last.”*<sup>177</sup>
64. Testimonies received by ODIHR also showed how the Russian authorities consistently denied or provided inadequate medical assistance to detainees, both for injuries sustained from torture and for routine medical care (e.g., regular medication that individuals may require).<sup>178</sup> For instance, a lawyer representing an arbitrarily detained civilian told ODIHR that, when her client suffered multiple injuries due to repeated beatings and torture and sought

170 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, para. 36; UKR.WS.536, paras. 19, 25, 28; UKR.WS.546, paras. 20, 33.

171 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.546, para. 33.

172 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 20-21, 23; UKR.WS.543, paras. 15, 16; UKR.WS.546, para. 22. See also UKR.WS.560, para. 43; UKR.WS.572, para. 73.

173 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.546, para. 37.

174 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Third Interim Report](#), para. 48; [Fourth Interim Report](#), paras. 51-52; [Fifth Interim report](#), para. 38; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 43.

175 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 23, 27; UKR.WS.496, paras. 12, 25, 27, 32-33, 35-36, 40; UKR.WS.520, paras. 21, 41-42; UKR.WS.536, paras. 20, 23-24, 26; UKR.WS.543, paras. 10-11, 13, 16; UKR.WS.546, paras. 15, 22, 28; UKR.WS.550, paras. 10, 13-14; UKR.WS.551, para. 16; UKR.WS.566, para. 171; UKR.WS.570, paras. 14, 16-18; UKR.WS.574, paras. 43, 50. See also UKR.WS.497, para. 22; UKR.WS.503, para. 37; UKR.WS.504, para. 38; UKR.WS.521, para. 9; UKR.WS.528, para. 42; UKR.WS.530, paras. 14, 17-18, 35-36; UKR.WS.531, para. 27; UKR.WS.532, paras. 57, 59; UKR.WS.541, para. 33; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.554, paras. 6, 9; UKR.WS.560, paras. 42-43; UKR.WS.562, para. 40; UKR.WS.572, paras. 66, 86.

176 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.520, para. 45; UKR.WS.543, para. 19; UKR.WS.546, para. 15; UKR.WS.566, para. 188. See also UKR.WS.531, para. 27.

177 ODIHR Witness interview UKR.WS.546, para. 23.

178 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.496, paras. 27, 40; UKR.WS.543, paras. 11, 16; UKR.WS.570, para. 17. See also UKR.WS.530, paras. 14, 17-18; UKR.WS.554, para. 9; UKR.WS.560, para. 43; UKR.WS.572, paras. 78-79, 84, 87, 89, 101-102.

medical assistance, the detention facility personnel refused to provide it, stating “*if they helped him, he would lose his leg*”.<sup>179</sup> Denial of medical assistance may also amount to a violation of the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

65. ODIHR also received credible reports of deaths in custody resulting from torture or inhuman conditions, including a failure to provide timely and adequate medical care.<sup>180</sup> One witness informed ODIHR that one of her cellmates, although not physically abused, had experienced such levels of mental suffering while held incommunicado for eight months that she took her own life.<sup>181</sup>
66. Another example is that of Victoriia Roshchyna, the 27-year-old Ukrainian investigative journalist who disappeared in Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia region in August 2023.<sup>182</sup> When the journalist’s body was handed over during an exchange of remains in February 2025, it was labelled as “unknown male” and “showed signs of cachexia” (extreme emaciation). The forensic examination found numerous signs consistent with torture, including “possible indications of the use of electric shocks”. The Russian authorities had removed several internal organs before returning the body, which prevented experts from determining the exact cause of death.<sup>183</sup> A media investigation found that, before being transferred to Taganrog Detention Centre No. 2 (Russian Federation), Roshchyna had been held incommunicado and subjected to electrocutions in Melitopol for four months.<sup>184</sup>

### C. THE SITUATION OF PRISONERS OF WAR

67. During the first half of 2025, ODIHR continued to receive accounts,<sup>185</sup> including through 28 witness testimonies, concerning violations of IHL and IHRL related to the treatment of Ukrainian POWs. Of these testimonies, 23 were provided by former POWs (20 men, three women) and five by family members of POWs.<sup>186</sup> Nine of the 23 POWs were released during the first half of 2025, attesting to the

179 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.530, para. 17.

180 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.551, para. 16. See also UKR.WS.528, para. 31; UKR.WS.530, para. 35.

181 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.552, paras. 37-38.

182 [Брифінг начальника Департаменту Офісу Генпрокурора Юрія Белоусова](#) [Briefing by Yurii Bielousov, Head of the Department of the Office of the Prosecutor General], YouTube, 24 April 2025, in Ukrainian. See also OSCE/ODIHR [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 51.

183 *Ibid.*

184 [Ghost Detainees. The Story of Viktoriia Roshchyna](#), iStories, 29 April 2025.

185 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Third Interim Report](#), para. 28; [Fourth Interim Report](#), para. 33; [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 52; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 66.

186 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.492, UKR.WS.494, UKR.WS.498, UKR.WS.506, UKR.WS.510, UKR.WS.516, UKR.WS.519, UKR.WS.522, UKR.WS.523, UKR.WS.524, UKR.WS.525, UKR.WS.526, UKR.WS.527, UKR.WS.544, UKR.WS.555, UKR.WS.557, UKR.WS.558, UKR.WS.559, UKR.WS.565, UKR.WS.571 (male POWs); UKR.WS.495, UKR.WS.507, UKR.WS.568 (female POWs); UKR.WS.508, UKR.WS.512, UKR.WS.513, UKR.WS.518, UKR.WS.553 (family members of POWs).

recurring nature of the violations.<sup>187</sup> The length of internment ranged from four to 38 months.

68. Witnesses described penal colonies, police stations, military bases and pre-trial detention centres as places of internment, but also discussed being held in makeshift barracks in factories, storage facilities, summer houses, abandoned farms, schools and clubs.<sup>188</sup> All but one witness stated that POWs had multiple transfers between detention facilities. Whereas most POWs discussed being detained together with civilians who were either apprehended for (alleged) criminal conduct or their former enlistment in the Ukrainian armed forces,<sup>189</sup> some noted being kept separate.<sup>190</sup> POWs were mostly kept segregated from detainees of the opposite gender,<sup>191</sup> with only one testimony indicating otherwise.<sup>192</sup>
69. POWs reported being interrogated by the Russian Investigative Committee, the FSB or members of the Russian armed forces.<sup>193</sup> According to 13 witnesses, torture and/or ill-treatment frequently occurred before and during interrogation,<sup>194</sup> with one witness saying “*Interrogation always involved torture.*”<sup>195</sup> Perpetrators relied on, for instance, pepper spray, stress positions, beatings, suffocation, waterboarding, electrocution (of genitalia), threats of rape and death, and rape with a foreign object. Eight witnesses noted how these interrogation techniques (or threats thereof) resulted in forced confessions or false testimony.<sup>196</sup> Witnesses further detailed instances in which individuals were pressured to sign documents without reading them.<sup>197</sup>

187 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, UKR.WS.522, UKR.WS.525, UKR.WS.526, UKR.WS.527, UKR.WS.544, UKR.WS.558, UKR.WS.559, UKR.WS.565.

188 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 12; UKR.WS.495, para. 5; UKR.WS.525, para. 12; UKR.WS.526, para. 7; UKR.WS.527, para. 14; UKR.WS.525, para. 19; UKR.WS.544, para. 10; UKR.WS.558, paras. 21, 56; UKR.WS.568, para. 4; UKR.WS.565, para. 10.

189 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 30; UKR.WS.495, para. 42; UKR.WS.516, para. 45; UKR.WS.518, para. 38; UKR.WS.523, para. 47; UKR.WS.527, para. 24; UKR.WS.558, para. 104; UKR.WS.559, para. 12; UKR.WS.565, paras. 12, 23; UKR.WS.568, para. 14; UKR.WS.571, para. 60.

190 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, paras. 59, 60; UKR.WS.522, para. 28; UKR.WS.525, para. 14; UKR.WS.526, para. 27.

191 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.516, para. 43; UKR.WS.519, para. 27; UKR.WS.523, para. 47; UKR.WS.524, para. 24; UKR.WS.526, para. 11; UKR.WS.544, para. 29; UKR.WS.555, para. 26; UKR.WS.558, para. 106; UKR.WS.568, para. 14; UKR.WS.571, para. 60.

192 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.492, para. 10.

193 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 13; UKR.WS.506, para. 26; UKR.WS.516, para. 75; UKR.WS.525, para. 15; UKR.WS.558, paras. 5, 67, 90; UKR.WS.571, para. 61; UKR.WS.555, para. 42.

194 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.492, paras. 11, 14; UKR.WS.494, para. 13; UKR.WS.495, para. 48; UKR.WS.510, para. 91; UKR.WS.519, para. 10; UKR.WS.522, paras. 31, 53; UKR.WS.524, para. 23; UKR.WS.525, paras. 15, 39; UKR.WS.527, para. 58; UKR.WS.544, para. 50; UKR.WS.557, paras. 66, 77, 78; UKR.WS.558, paras. 32, 33, 58; UKR.WS.565, paras. 17, 24, 36; UKR.WS.568, para. 9.

195 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.492, para. 11. See also Section IV.b. **Torture and ill-treatment in areas under the control of the Russian authorities.**

196 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 13; UKR.WS.495, para. 15; UKR.WS.498, para. 16; UKR.WS.508, para. 19; UKR.WS.510, para. 91; UKR.WS.519, para. 11; UKR.WS.557, para. 79; UKR.WS.568, para. 18.

197 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, paras. 8, 10; UKR.WS.495, para. 13; UKR.WS.498, paras. 16, 33; UKR.WS.523, para. 34; UKR.WS.544, para. 40; UKR.WS.555, para. 32; UKR.WS.565, para. 17.

70. Twenty six of 28 witnesses gave accounts of torture perpetrated against Ukrainian POWs, confirming its continued widespread and systematic use.<sup>198</sup> Physical violence through beatings was recounted most often, with some witnesses indicating that these took place on a daily basis.<sup>199</sup> *“During my 1,008 days of captivity, there wasn’t a day when I wasn’t beaten.”*<sup>200</sup> Guards would, for instance, beat the letter ‘Z’ onto the backs of POWs or hit prisoners during meals, in the showers or in other settings while naked.<sup>201</sup> This abuse resulted in broken teeth and bones,<sup>202</sup> long-term disability or death.<sup>203</sup> Stated reasons for abuse included asking for soap or medicine, reading a book, going to the toilet without permission, misremembering prison rules, or for no apparent reason.<sup>204</sup> One witness explained how *“[t]he extent and nature of the beating depended on their mood, the war, the weather”*.<sup>205</sup> POWs reported being beaten with rubber batons, plastic pipes, weapons, sticks, electric cords, wooden paddles, belts and chains.<sup>206</sup>
71. As previously reported by ODIHR,<sup>207</sup> POWs described the use of beatings and electric shocks upon arrival at a facility.<sup>208</sup> A witness recounted *“There was a reception process — they put the Russian national anthem on the speakers, and there were a lot of special forces, many of them with dogs, and they were beating us up all night. There were 76 of us, and three didn’t make it after these beatings.”*<sup>209</sup> In some locations, women did not have to go through this ‘reception process’ and were beaten less frequently than men.<sup>210</sup> Other torture methods employed included electric shocks, setting dogs on detainees, suffocation, waterboarding, mock executions, body suspension, burning skin with hot

198 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Fourth Interim Report](#), para. 33; [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 6; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para.8.

199 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.519, paras. 7, 17; UKR.WS.544, para. 47.

200 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.544, para. 55.

201 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, paras. 19, 28; UKR.WS.522, paras. 21, 25; UKR.WS.523, para. 24; UKR.WS.526, paras. 38, 55; UKR.WS.527, para. 54; UKR.WS.557, para. 91; UKR.WS.565, para. 14; UKR.WS.568, para. 23.

202 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 29; UKR.WS.495, para. 12; UKR.WS.516, para. 119; UKR.WS.525, para. 6; UKR.WS.544, para. 26.

203 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 86; UKR.WS.527, para. 48.

204 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 20; UKR.WS.498, para. 48; UKR.WS.527, paras. 66, 73; UKR.WS.544, paras. 23, 47; UKR.WS.553, para. 18; UKR.WS.558, para. 37; UKR.WS.559, para. 28; UKR.WS.565, para. 37.

205 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.523, para. 53.

206 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, paras. 10, 19, 28; UKR.WS.495, para. 12; UKR.WS.498, paras. 23, 41; UKR.WS.507, para. 26; UKR.WS.508, para. 21; UKR.WS.510, paras. 89, 99; UKR.WS.519, para. 6; UKR.WS.522, paras. 18, 20, 39; UKR.WS.523, paras. 16, 29, 38; UKR.WS.525, para. 21; UKR.WS.526, paras. 17, 37, 35; UKR.WS.527, para. 21; UKR.WS.544, para. 12; UKR.WS.555, para. 57; UKR.WS.557, para. 29; UKR.WS.558, para. 54; UKR.WS.559, para. 11; UKR.WS.565, para. 35.

207 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Fourth Interim Report](#), para. 70; [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 56; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 73.

208 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 10; UKR.WS.498, para. 23; UKR.WS.512, para. 16; UKR.WS.519, para. 7; UKR.WS.523, para. 16; UKR.WS.524, para. 29; UKR.WS.525, para. 13; UKR.WS.526, para. 33; UKR.WS.555, para. 57; UKR.WS.557, para. 29; UKR.WS.558, para. 120; UKR.WS.559, paras. 11, 17; UKR.WS.565, para. 34; UKR.WS.571, para. 75.

209 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.510, para. 86.

210 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 24; UKR.WS.507, para. 26.

water, setting body hair on fire and sexual violence.<sup>211</sup> Two POWs reported being kept in cold isolation cells for up to one month, without adequate food, water or sanitation, while one of them was kept there naked.<sup>212</sup> POWs were also threatened with food deprivation, sexual violence, bodily harm and death.<sup>213</sup> Witnesses furthermore described arbitrary killings, including instances where prisoners were tortured (usually beaten) to death or shot.<sup>214</sup>

72. Some witnesses had to do thousands of squats and push-ups as punishment, at times while naked.<sup>215</sup> Simultaneously, prisoners were prohibited from exercising freely.<sup>216</sup> POWs were further subjected to derogatory and humiliating treatment, including insults, being made to crawl (sometimes for hours on end), clean dirty toilets with bare hands, call each other derogatory names and imitate animals.<sup>217</sup> POWs were forced to learn the Russian national anthem and were expected to sing it on demand<sup>218</sup> or face beatings.<sup>219</sup> The loudspeakers in the detention facilities would play Russian military songs on repeat,<sup>220</sup> while POWs were made to chant “*Glory to Russia*” every time their cell door opened and could only speak in Russian.<sup>221</sup> Some groups of POWs were nevertheless treated worse than others, for example, soldiers from Central or Western Ukraine, members of the ‘Azov’ regiment and ‘Aidar’ battalion, or those with tattoos of Ukrainian national symbols or designs perceived by the Russian authorities as affiliated with right-wing ideologies.<sup>222</sup> Witnesses reported that some individuals were forced to remove their tattoos using sharp stones.<sup>223</sup>

211 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, paras. 23, 37; UKR.WS.495, para. 27; UKR.WS.507, para. 10; UKR.WS.508, paras. 21, 27, 119; UKR.WS.510, para. 99; UKR.WS.516, paras. 77, 125, 127, 149; UKR.WS.519, para. 8; UKR.WS.522, paras. 13, 21; UKR.WS.524, para. 45; UKR.WS.526, paras. 17, 37; UKR.WS.527, paras. 48, 50, 51, 58, 79; UKR.WS.544, paras. 26, 36, 52; UKR.WS.553, para. 18; UKR.WS.555, paras. 59, 77; UKR.WS.557, paras. 62, 76; UKR.WS.558, paras. 40, 88, 120; UKR.WS.559, para. 13; UKR.WS.565, paras. 14, 16, 22, 34; UKR.WS.568, paras. 9, 10; UKR.WS.571, paras. 75, 111. For more details, see Section IV.d. **Conflict-related sexual violence.**

212 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.524, para. 36; UKR.WS.544, para. 54.

213 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.519, para. 16; UKR.WS.544, paras. 26, 59; UKR.WS.558, paras. 45, 70, 88.

214 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 12; UKR.WS.508, para. 21; UKR.WS.510, para. 86; UKR.WS.523, paras. 22, 26; UKR.WS.525, para. 21; UKR.WS.544, para. 14; UKR.WS.557, para. 19; UKR.WS.559, para. 21.

215 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.498, para. 49; UKR.WS.510, para. 91; UKR.WS.519, paras. 6, 9; UKR.WS.522, para. 21; UKR.WS.571, para. 120.

216 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.555, para. 75.

217 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.498, para. 41; UKR.WS.507, para. 3; UKR.WS.510, para. 13; UKR.WS.516, paras. 117, 178; UKR.WS.519, para. 8; UKR.WS.524, para. 42; UKR.WS.526, para. 34; UKR.WS.544, paras. 15, 20; UKR.WS.555, para. 75; UKR.WS.565, paras. 11, 15, 25, 38.

218 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 20; UKR.WS.495, para. 39; UKR.WS.522, para. 37; UKR.WS.523, para. 27; UKR.WS.527, para. 32; UKR.WS.544, para. 35; UKR.WS.555, para. 72; UKR.WS.559, para. 20; UKR.WS.565, para. 22; UKR.WS.571, para. 54.

219 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.498, para. 30; UKR.WS.507, para. 9; UKR.WS.516, para. 47; UKR.WS.519, para. 9; UKR.WS.523, para. 27; UKR.WS.527, para. 32; UKR.WS.544, para. 35; UKR.WS.555, para. 73; UKR.WS.559, para. 20; UKR.WS.565, para. 22; UKR.WS.571, para. 121.

220 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.516, para. 47; UKR.WS.519, para. 17; UKR.WS.544, para. 35; UKR.WS.555, para. 73.

221 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.519, para. 15; UKR.WS.522, para. 66.

222 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 24; UKR.WS.495, para. 58; UKR.WS.498, para. 29; UKR.WS.507, para. 16; UKR.WS.516, paras. 119, 149; UKR.WS.522, para. 68; UKR.WS.523, para. 29; UKR.WS.526, para. 23; UKR.WS.544, para. 26; UKR.WS.558, para. 103; UKR.WS.568, para. 12.

223 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.525, para. 17; UKR.WS.558, para. 97.

73. During the first half of 2025, as in previous reporting periods, ODIHR received testimonies describing the poor conditions of internment.<sup>224</sup> POWs were kept in overcrowded cells and barracks, with inadequate heating and sleeping arrangements. Lights were variously turned on all day or defective, windows were broken or kept open in winter and closed in summer.<sup>225</sup> A witness recalled how “[w]e were 17 in a cell meant for two people.”<sup>226</sup> At the same time, witnesses reported being punished for sleeping on the floor when there were no beds, or for wearing jackets when there was no heating.<sup>227</sup> Hygiene was a common problem, with cells infested with rats, insects or mould.<sup>228</sup> POWs frequently had no access to showers<sup>229</sup> or water for washing<sup>230</sup> for prolonged periods. Access to soap, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes was also limited. Witnesses reported being given used toothbrushes or needing to use the same razor as other POWs.<sup>231</sup> Inadequate access to toilets sometimes led to incontinence.<sup>232</sup>
74. Witnesses reported receiving insufficient food and water, noting how “[...] three bread loaves and three bottles of water (1.5 litres) [had to be shared] between 30 people”.<sup>233</sup> Meals came on an irregular schedule,<sup>234</sup> and POWs were not given enough time to eat, with some reporting having as little as 30 seconds to finish a meal.<sup>235</sup>

224 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Fourth Interim Report](#), para. 69; [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 63; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 78.

225 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 8; UKR.WS.495, paras. 11, 13, 15; UKR.WS.498, paras. 14, 19; UKR.WS.510, para. 58; UKR.WS.513, para. 11; UKR.WS.516, paras. 51, 137; UKR.WS.519, paras. 6, 17; UKR.WS.522, paras. 25, 67; UKR.WS.525, paras. 12, 14, 24, 38; UKR.WS.526, para. 52; UKR.WS.527, paras. 14, 42, 63, 64; UKR.WS.544, paras. 10, 64; UKR.WS.555, paras. 24, 132; UKR.WS.557, para. 40; UKR.WS.558, paras. 82, 100; UKR.WS.559, para. 7; UKR.WS.568, para. 20; UKR.WS.571, paras. 21, 30.

226 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.498, para. 14.

227 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 25; UKR.WS.498, para. 34; UKR.WS.507, para. 11; UKR.WS.516, para. 147; UKR.WS.555, para. 63; UKR.WS.557, para. 83; UKR.WS.558, para. 81; UKR.WS.565, para. 22.

228 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 14; UKR.WS.495, para. 38; UKR.WS.498, para. 35; UKR.WS.516, para. 137; UKR.WS.518, para. 39; UKR.WS.519, para. 17; UKR.WS.522, para. 42; UKR.WS.525, para. 14; UKR.WS.526, para. 52; UKR.WS.527, para. 71; UKR.WS.544, para. 10; UKR.WS.558, paras. 79, 100; UKR.WS.565, para. 20.

229 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.507, para. 10; UKR.WS.571, para. 66.

230 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.498, para. 14; UKR.WS.516, para. 113; UKR.WS.525, para. 23; UKR.WS.555, para. 46.

231 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 113; UKR.WS.522, para. 42; UKR.WS.527, para. 65; UKR.WS.544, paras. 68, 69; UKR.WS.555, para. 47; UKR.WS.559, para. 20; UKR.WS.571, para. 138.

232 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, paras. 8, 10; UKR.WS.498, para. 14; UKR.WS.506, para. 39; UKR.WS.516, para. 53; UKR.WS.525, para. 9; UKR.WS.527, para. 14; UKR.WS.557, para. 23; UKR.WS.558, para. 77; UKR.WS.565, para. 37.

233 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 12. See also UKR.WS.525, para. 22.

234 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, paras. 8, 12, 14; UKR.WS.495, para. 16; UKR.WS.498, paras. 9, 14, 44; UKR.WS.507, para. 29; UKR.WS.508, para. 20; UKR.WS.510, para. 58; UKR.WS.512, para. 17; UKR.WS.516, paras. 47, 113, 120; UKR.WS.519, para. 6; UKR.WS.522, para. 78; UKR.WS.523, para. 37; UKR.WS.525, paras. 14, 22, 27; UKR.WS.526, para. 55; UKR.WS.527, para. 14; UKR.WS.544, paras. 24, 44, 63; UKR.WS.553, para. 18; UKR.WS.555, paras. 25, 46, 48; UKR.WS.557, para. 23, 36, 45; UKR.WS.558, paras. 79, 81, 101; UKR.WS.559, paras. 9, 13; UKR.WS.568, para. 20; UKR.WS.571, para. 21.

235 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 27; UKR.WS.498, para. 29; UKR.WS.506, para. 33; UKR.WS.510, para. 118; UKR.WS.522, para. 47; UKR.WS.525, para. 27; UKR.WS.527, para. 32; UKR.WS.553, para. 18; UKR.WS.555, para. 48; UKR.WS.558, para. 101.

75. ODIHR received reports of infections of contagious diseases among POWs, including scabies, HIV, hepatitis and tuberculosis.<sup>236</sup> For instance, witnesses reported being kept with people infected with tuberculosis and were not provided medical checks or treatment.<sup>237</sup> Medical aid was administered only in exceptional cases or not at all.<sup>238</sup> Dental services were so poor that “*inmates had to pull out their own teeth*”.<sup>239</sup> Two witnesses reported doctors of internment facilities beating and using tasers on POWs instead of providing medical assistance.<sup>240</sup> ODIHR also received accounts of deaths in detention due to a lack of medical aid.<sup>241</sup> Witnesses frequently had serious physical and mental health issues after their release from detention, including severe weight loss, distortion of their menstrual cycle and psychological trauma;<sup>242</sup> several had to undergo surgery or treatment, while others even attempted suicide.<sup>243</sup>
76. Nine witnesses and survivors described a violation that has been reported by ODIHR since the beginning of the armed conflict: POWs being subjected to public curiosity by being made to appear in photos and provide video statements that were subsequently posted online.<sup>244</sup> These videos either have the POWs list their personal details or give pro-Russian statements.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, 11 survivors expressed an inability to exercise their right to correspondence.<sup>246</sup> When POWs were allowed to exchange letters and receive parcels, censorship was applied.<sup>247</sup> Often, letters were not delivered and parcels were stolen.<sup>248</sup>

236 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.513, para. 11; UKR.WS.516, paras. 71, 137; UKR.WS.527, paras. 45, 48, 75; UKR.WS.544, paras. 23, 64; UKR.WS.558, para. 146; UKR.WS.565, para. 39.

237 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 83; UKR.WS.516, para. 113; UKR.WS.525, para. 9; UKR.WS.526, para. 52; UKR.WS.558, para. 146.

238 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 22; UKR.WS.495, paras. 48, 60; UKR.WS.507, para. 6; UKR.WS.516, para. 69; UKR.WS.522, para. 24; UKR.WS.523, para. 44; UKR.WS.525, para. 9; UKR.WS.527, paras. 35, 71; UKR.WS.555, para. 30; UKR.WS.557, para. 79; UKR.WS.558, para. 102; UKR.WS.565, para. 37; UKR.WS.568, para. 22; UKR.WS.571, para. 126.

239 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.494, para. 22.

240 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 115; UKR.WS.519, para. 17.

241 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.522, paras. 57, 60; UKR.WS.558, para. 146.

242 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 40; UKR.WS.495, para. 90; UKR.WS.506, para. 34; UKR.WS.516, para. 185; UKR.WS.525, para. 37; UKR.WS.544, para. 73; UKR.WS.557, para. 93; UKR.WS.558, paras. 173, 174.

243 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 90; UKR.WS.522, para. 76; UKR.WS.523, para. 32; UKR.WS.544, para. 73; UKR.WS.557, paras. 84, 93; UKR.WS.558, paras. 173, 174; UKR.WS.568, para. 9; UKR.WS.571, para. 138.

244 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.498, para. 36; UKR.WS.508, para. 14; UKR.WS.523, para. 42; UKR.WS.527, para. 72; UKR.WS.544, paras. 19, 72; UKR.WS.553, para. 8; UKR.WS.555, para. 34; UKR.WS.557, para. 111; UKR.WS.565, paras. 91, 92. See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Fourth Interim Report](#), para. 33; [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 60; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 87.

245 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.498, para. 36; UKR.WS.523, para. 42; UKR.WS.527, para. 72; UKR.WS.544, paras. 19, 72; UKR.WS.557, para. 111; UKR.WS.565, paras. 91, 92.

246 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.506, para. 20; UKR.WS.507, para. 7; UKR.WS.510, paras. 43-46; UKR.WS.516, para. 93; UKR.WS.524, para. 53; UKR.WS.526, para. 44; UKR.WS.527, paras. 41, 69; UKR.WS.555, paras. 36, 84; UKR.WS.557, para. 22; UKR.WS.558, para. 109; UKR.WS.559, para. 24. It appears that, after trials, POWs would generally be permitted to exchange correspondence. See ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.508, para. 69; UKR.WS.518, para. 42; UKR.WS.519, para. 25.

247 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.523, para. 34.

248 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.498, para. 36; UKR.WS.522, para. 54; UKR.WS.525, para. 31.

77. Witnesses also told ODIHR that the Russian authorities didn't inform them about their POW status nor the accompanying rights and guarantees.<sup>249</sup> Witnesses indicated that the prison administration would instead tell them “[...] that we have no rights, that we are nobody”,<sup>250</sup> suggesting “[...] that if anyone mentioned the Geneva Convention, they would take care of that person.”<sup>251</sup> Nevertheless, ODIHR received accounts of visits to POWs by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Russian Red Cross<sup>252</sup> and the Russian Ombudsperson.<sup>253</sup> During these visits, POWs would be instructed to withhold complaints or risk being punished.<sup>254</sup>
78. ODIHR continues to face challenges in accessing and interviewing POWs held by both parties to the conflict.<sup>255</sup> To date, ODIHR has only been able to interview Ukrainian POWs after their release from internment. When asked about the treatment of Russian POWs, the Ukrainian authorities assert adherence to IHL, detailing conditions of detention, daily routines, adequate provision of food, water, medical care and sanitation, access to the ICRC and communication with relatives. Meanwhile, despite repeated requests from ODIHR, the Russian authorities have provided little information about the treatment of Ukrainian POWs.

#### D. CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

79. During the first half of 2025, ODIHR received 23 testimonies on CRSV,<sup>256</sup> of which 21 were provided by direct survivors. Six testimonies described violence perpetrated against women, 15 against men, and two contained incidents against both men and women. All the reported acts occurred in settings of detention, including upon apprehension, during interrogations and in detention facility showers. Survivors and witnesses referred to CRSV occurring in detention centres in Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine, including, notably, in Donetsk and Kherson regions,<sup>257</sup> and Kamyshin, Rostov, Taganrog and Kineshma within the Russian Federation.<sup>258</sup>

249 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.523, para. 2; UKR.WS.525, para. 10; UKR.WS.526, para. 21; UKR.WS.544, para. 61; UKR.WS.555, para. 83; UKR.WS.557, para. 21; UKR.WS.558, para. 125; UKR.WS.568, para. 7.

250 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.544, para. 61.

251 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.558, para. 125.

252 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.522, para. 52; UKR.WS.523, para. 34; UKR.WS.524, para. 63; UKR.WS.544, para. 70; UKR.WS.559, para. 23; UKR.WS.565, para. 30.

253 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 25; UKR.WS.522, para. 51; UKR.WS.525, para. 30; UKR.WS.526, para. 59; UKR.WS.544, para. 70; UKR.WS.559, para. 23; UKR.WS.568, para. 107.

254 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.524, para. 67; UKR.WS.527, paras. 61, 70; UKR.WS.544, para. 70; UKR.WS.559, para. 23; UKR.WS.565, para. 30.

255 See OSCE/ODIHR, *Fifth Interim Report*, para. 72; *Sixth Interim Report*, para. 90.

256 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.492; UKR.WS.494; UKR.WS.495; UKR.WS.507; UKR.WS.508; UKR.WS.510; UKR.WS.516; UKR.WS.519; UKR.WS.520; UKR.WS.522; UKR.WS.524; UKR.WS.526; UKR.WS.527; UKR.WS.530; UKR.WS.531; UKR.WS.536; UKR.WS.546; UKR.WS.555; UKR.WS.556; UKR.WS.557; UKR.WS.565; UKR.WS.568; UKR.WS.574.

257 See ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495; UKR.WS.507; UKR.WS.522; UKR.WS.568; UKR.WS.574, UKR.WS.531; UKR.WS.536.

258 See ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.519; UKR.WS.520; UKR.WS.555; UKR.WS.495; UKR.WS.508; UKR.WS.510; UKR.WS.516; and UKR.WS.546; UKR.WS.557.

80. The types of CRSV reported were largely similar to those detailed in previous Interim Reports.<sup>259</sup> Survivors recounted instances of rape and attempted rape,<sup>260</sup> including against minors,<sup>261</sup> and with the use of a foreign object.<sup>262</sup> One survivor described being group raped for several days, during which she was also forced to watch another detainee being raped in front of her.<sup>263</sup> These acts were sometimes filmed.<sup>264</sup> Several survivors reported instances where threats of sexual violence,<sup>265</sup> the rape of a family member,<sup>266</sup> or rape by another detainee were used.<sup>267</sup>
81. Survivors told ODIHR that Russian prison guards and soldiers used electric shocks on the genitals of male detainees.<sup>268</sup> They also reported striking of genitals,<sup>269</sup> castrations and threats thereof,<sup>270</sup> as well as the insertion of foreign objects into the urethra.<sup>271</sup> One testimony recalled “*They were beaten on their genital parts, and whilst doing that, they were saying, ‘It is so you don’t have any kids in the future.’*”<sup>272</sup>
82. Female survivors testified to problems with reproductive hygiene and health care. Women noted that no menstrual hygiene products had been provided.<sup>273</sup> Some female survivors reported not menstruating in detention altogether,<sup>274</sup> indicating their poor health. One survivor reported contracting a sexually transmitted disease during her detention.<sup>275</sup>
83. ODIHR was informed about various incidents of forced nudity,<sup>276</sup> frequently perpetrated by Russian law enforcement personnel and members of the Russian armed forces. This included, for example, male and female survivors being made to stand naked in front of the opposite sex for hours<sup>277</sup> or enduring

259 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Fourth Interim Report](#), paras. 62, 76, [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 77; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 97-100.

260 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.492, para. 12; UKR.WS.495, paras. 27-28; UKR.WS.507, para. 10; UKR.WS.510, para. 99; UKR.WS.530, paras. 18, 35; UKR.WS.568, para. 10; UKR.WS.574, para. 37.

261 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.492, paras. 12, 17.

262 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.492, para. 14; UKR.WS.495, para. 52; UKR.WS.516, para. 149; UKR.WS.519, para. 28; UKR.WS.565, para. 7; UKR.WS.574, para. 59.

263 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.574, paras. 37, 39, 40, 41, 44.

264 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.492, para. 14.

265 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 101; UKR.WS.531, para. 21; UKR.WS.536, para. 53; UKR.WS.556, para. 12.

266 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.536, para. 17; UKR.WS.574, para. 48.

267 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.546, para. 29.

268 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.492, para. 16; UKR.WS.510, para. 99; UKR.WS.520, paras. 47, 53; UKR.WS.524, para. 23; UKR.WS.527, para. 58; UKR.WS.531, para. 16; UKR.WS.536, para. 57; UKR.WS.546, para. 29; UKR.WS.555, para. 77; UKR.WS.557, para. 78; UKR.WS.568, para. 9.

269 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.508, para. 119; UKR.WS.510, para. 99; UKR.WS.522, para. 21; UKR.WS.524, para. 55; UKR.WS.565, para. 24.

270 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 82; UKR.WS.522, para. 41.

271 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.524, para. 50.

272 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.508, para. 119.

273 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 25; UKR.WS.507, para. 11.

274 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 25; UKR.WS.507, para. 11.

275 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.495, para. 25.

276 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.494, para. 19; UKR.WS.495, para. 5; UKR.WS.516, para. 118.

277 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 5; UKR.WS.527, para. 51.

beatings while naked.<sup>278</sup> Survivors specifically mentioned incidents related to detention facility showers: not only having to be naked in the showers in the presence of prison guards of the opposite sex,<sup>279</sup> but also having to go to these showers naked, in front of guards and detainees of the opposite sex.<sup>280</sup> To that end, a survivor described how *“All the prison guards were in the corridor watching, as well as Russian civilian prisoners. The prison guards looked at us and whistled. ... When we were walking back, the prison guards were saying ‘Oh this one is nice [...]’.”*<sup>281</sup> Guards would, in addition, explicitly state which sexual acts they would like to engage in. There was also a practice of administering electric shocks and carrying out beatings in the showers,<sup>282</sup> taking advantage of detainees’ vulnerability in these spaces.

84. Survivors also provided accounts of degrading statements of a sexual nature made by Russian prison guards or members of the Russian armed forces.<sup>283</sup> One witness explained that, after being threatened with rape and subjected to beatings, she was undressed and called *“a Ukrainian whore”*.<sup>284</sup> As reported to ODIHR,<sup>285</sup> witnesses described homophobic statements meant to humiliate detainees.<sup>286</sup> *“[...] he constantly voiced sexual threats and asked us about our sexual orientation. When we said ‘regular’, he said ‘You want to go to Europe — everyone is gay there, so you must be too.’”*<sup>287</sup> Or about their leadership. *“They would ask us what is Zelenskyy, or a specific cellmate, and we would have to say ‘He’s gay.’”*<sup>288</sup>
85. Finally, survivors told ODIHR about sexualized acts of torture. Aside from the insertion of foreign objects into the urethra,<sup>289</sup> one survivor recounted how prison guards made a detainee brush his teeth with a toothbrush that had previously been inserted in his anus.<sup>290</sup> Another survivor detailed how electric shocks were used on several naked detainees standing close to one another, causing involuntary incontinence.<sup>291</sup>
86. ODIHR expresses its deep concern over the ongoing and apparently intensifying practice of CRSV in places of detention under the control of the Russian authorities. ODIHR has received testimonies on acts of CRSV that are increasingly cruel in nature. It reiterates that the acts of violence described

278 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.522, para. 21.

279 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.507, para. 10; UKR.WS.536, para. 28.

280 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.495, para. 53; UKR.WS.568, para. 23.

281 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.495, para. 53.

282 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.516, paras. 118, 121; UKR.WS.519, para. 8; UKR.WS.520, para. 47; UKR.WS.527, para. 58; UKR.WS.546, para. 29.

283 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.516, para. 149; UKR.WS.526, para. 34; UKR.WS.531, para. 21; UKR.WS.546, para. 29.

284 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.531, para. 21.

285 See OSCE/ODIHR, *Fifth Interim Report*, para. 78; *Sixth Interim Report*, para. 100.

286 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.516, para. 149; UKR.WS.526, para. 34.

287 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.516, para. 149.

288 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.546, para. 29.

289 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.524, para. 50.

290 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.565, para. 44.

291 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.565, para. 34.

above constitute grave violations of IHL and IHRL and may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>292</sup> Importantly, as of 29 May 2025, the National Police of Ukraine has opened 110 criminal cases on allegations of CRSV committed against 209 survivors.<sup>293</sup>

## E. ADMINISTRATION OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND RELATED VIOLATIONS

### Attempts to alter the status and character of the occupied territories

87. Under IHL, occupation is presumed to be a transitional and temporary regime with the occupying power not acquiring sovereignty over the occupied territory. IHL presumes that the local population lacks the necessary free choice during occupation to agree to changes in the status of the occupied territory or to renounce their rights, and therefore the occupying power must refrain from bringing about irreversible changes that would fundamentally alter the status or character of such territories. The so-called ‘annexation’ of territories under occupation by the Russian Federation remains illegal, effects no change to their status as Ukrainian territory under international law and cannot deprive civilians of the protections afforded to them under IHL.<sup>294</sup> ODIHR has continued to receive accounts regarding the coercion of residents in the occupied territories to acquire Russian citizenship, as well as on the imposition of the Russian Federation curriculum and military-patriotic education for children. These policies seem to be increasing in 2025 through newly implemented or enhanced measures, showing that the Russian authorities are continuing efforts to alter the demographic composition of the territories, force declarations of allegiance and change the social status quo.

#### *Forced adoption of Russian citizenship*

88. During the first half of 2025, ODIHR received accounts,<sup>295</sup> including through 25 witness testimonies,<sup>296</sup> on sustained and systematic efforts by the Russian Federation to force residents of the occupied areas of Ukraine to acquire Russian citizenship, confirming the findings documented in previous Interim Reports. In 2025, according to witness accounts, Russian citizenship continued to be required for residents in the occupied territories to access health care, various social services, employment, education, to maintain possession of their

292 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 101.

293 Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

294 GC IV, art. 47; Hague Regulations (1907), art. 43.

295 Information provided to ODIHR by eight NGOs working IHRL and IHL issues in the occupied territories; Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

296 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493; UKR.WS.500; UKR.WS.501; UKR.WS.502; UKR.WS.504; UKR.WS.505; UKR.WS.509; UKR.WS.511; UKR.WS.515; UKR.WS.547; UKR.WS.551; UKR.WS.529; UKR.WS.531; UKR.WS.533; UKR.WS.534; UKR.WS.538; UKR.WS.539; UKR.WS.548; UKR.WS.550; UKR.WS.552; UKR.WS.556; UKR.WS.561; UKR.WS.563; UKR.WS.566; UKR.WS.576.

properties and to move freely, including to leave the occupied territories.<sup>297</sup> Additionally, ODIHR received witness accounts on new developments from 2025 regarding the requirement for Ukrainians without Russian citizenship to register as foreigners and acquire a residency permit by 10 September 2025 in order to avoid deportation. Likewise, ODIHR obtained accounts indicating that, since the end of 2024, former prisoners have been kept in immigration detention centres for simply not holding Russian citizenship. In addition to violating the IHL framework on belligerent occupation, the regulations, restrictions and intimidation reportedly applied against Ukrainian citizens may violate the prohibition against discrimination based on nationality<sup>298</sup> and could amount to forced declarations of allegiance to an occupying power.<sup>299</sup> The imposition of Russian citizenship may further lead to forced conscription, which is explicitly prohibited under IHL.<sup>300</sup>

89. Sixteen witnesses interviewed by ODIHR stated that residents in the occupied territories continued to need Russian citizenship to be able to access public healthcare services, including ambulances, a practice started in 2023 that lasts to this day.<sup>301</sup> In addition to having to show a Russian passport to get medical care, witnesses reported that the occupation authorities required residents to possess a Russian individual insurance account number (SNILS), for which Russian citizenship is also prerequisite. Without these documents, people could only buy basic medications at local pharmacies and were able to go for treatment only in a limited number of private clinics.
90. Eight witnesses reported that Russian citizenship continued to be needed to leave the occupied territories<sup>302</sup> or to move freely in towns and villages or between regions without being searched or harassed at checkpoints.<sup>303</sup> One witness from Kherson region stated that “[W]ithout a Russian passport, I was unable to leave the occupied territories [...] I had to get the passport in order to be able to leave.”<sup>304</sup> Another witness from the same region added “[I]f you try to go to Crimea, it will be much harder with only a Ukrainian passport. You will be searched and harassed and maybe they won’t let you pass.”<sup>305</sup> Two witnesses

297 See OSCE/ODIHR, [First Interim Report](#), para. 80; [Second Interim Report](#), paras. 57-60; [Third Interim Report](#), paras. 91-97; [Fourth Interim Report](#), paras. 98-95; [Fifth Interim Report](#), paras. 80-87; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 103-108.

298 Particularly as it relates to the provision of essential services and humanitarian assistance, see GC IV, art. 27(3); API I, arts. 69-70.

299 Hague Regulations (1907), art. 45.

300 GC IV, art. 51. The conscription of citizens of an occupied territory to the armed forces of the occupying authority constitutes a war crime, see GC IV, art. 147; ICC Statute, art. 8(2)(a)(v). See also Section IV.e.ii. **Forced conscription and mobilization into the armed forces of the Russian Federation.**

301 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 35; UKR.WS.501, para. 17; UKR.WS.502, para. 8; UKR.WS.505, para. 24; UKR.WS.511, para. 9; UKR.WS.529, para. 12; UKR.WS.533, paras. 48-49; UKR.WS.534, para. 34; UKR.WS.547, para. 43; UKR.WS.548, para. 26, 28; UKR.WS.550, para. 27; UKR.WS.552, para.10; UKR.WS.556, para.26; UKR.WS.561, para.10; UKR.WS.566, para. 189; UKR.WS.576, para. 38.

302 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 47; UKR.WS.529, para. 34; UKR.WS.534, paras. 5-7; UKR.WS.548, para. 26; UKR.WS.551, paras. 18; UKR.WS.566, para. 94.

303 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 39; UKR.WS.505, para. 51; UKR.WS.511, para. 9.

304 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.493, para. 47.

305 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.505, para. 51.

also reported that residents in the occupied territories had to have Russian car insurance to be able to drive vehicles, which was not possible to get without having Russian citizenship.<sup>306</sup>

91. Seven witnesses interviewed by ODIHR reported that residents in the occupied territories had to re-register their properties under Russian law, for which Russian citizenship was needed, otherwise the properties would be confiscated.<sup>307</sup> To do so, residents had to be present in person, which poses a significant challenge for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) residing in Ukrainian Government-controlled territory, as they would have to come back to the occupied territories to take care of this procedure. Many people were reluctant to do so, because they were afraid of reprisals from the Russian authorities, as they might be perceived as pro-Ukrainian for leaving the occupied territories in the first place. However, if residents did not return, the property could be declared ‘ownerless’ and confiscated, which has already happened according to witnesses.<sup>308</sup>
92. Three witnesses further noted that Russian citizenship was needed for residents in the occupied territories to be able to keep their jobs or get new ones, a policy which started being implemented from the summer of 2023 and continued to be a requirement.<sup>309</sup> A witness from Luhansk region recalled *“I was told I needed a Russian passport to continue working, and to get paid I would need a bank account, which also required a Russian passport”*.<sup>310</sup> Two witnesses similarly reported that bank accounts could only be opened if residents had Russian citizenship.<sup>311</sup> Moreover, a witness from Zaporizhzhia region told ODIHR *“[T]here were deadlines for people with businesses. Many people worked until they could, but, when faced with pressure from the occupation authorities, they would re-register [their businesses] in accordance with the Russian document and passport. If they would not, their businesses were closed down.”*<sup>312</sup>
93. Having Russian citizenship also affected the length of time prisoners were incarcerated and led to arbitrary detentions. As a former prisoner from Kherson region who was released in December 2024 explained *“[Prisoners] who had Russian passports could leave once their sentences were over, but those who didn’t have a Russian passport, once their sentence was served, they were taken by the immigration authorities and are still being kept by them.”* He added that

306 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 39; UKR.WS.511, para. 9. See also UKR.WS.552, para. 7.

307 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 55; UKR.WS.501, para. 34; UKR.WS.505, paras. 40, 43, 48; UKR.WS.529, paras. 41, 43; UKR.WS.547, para. 43; UKR.WS.563, para. 20; UKR.WS.576, para. 39. See also UKR.WS.552, para. 6.

308 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.505, paras. 43; UKR.WS.548, para. 34.

309 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.501, para.17; UKR.WS.505, para. 52; UKR.WS.548, para. 25.

310 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.501, para.17.

311 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.505, para. 55; UKR.WS.552, para.23.

312 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.552, para. 9. See also UKR.WS.566, para. 189.

he had had to obtain Russian citizenship to leave the occupied territories and avoid months-long detention by the Russian immigration authorities.<sup>313</sup>

94. Seven witnesses also reported that Russian citizenship continued to be needed for residents in the occupied territories to access various services and social benefits,<sup>314</sup> for humanitarian aid,<sup>315</sup> to obtain SIM cards for their phones<sup>316</sup> and to communicate with imprisoned relatives.<sup>317</sup> Moreover, a witness from Zaporizhzhia region explained to ODIHR that “*When you receive the [Russian] passport, you have to go through the pledge of allegiance to the Russian Constitution*”, further adding that “*The Constitution they gave us stipulated that parents who don’t ensure Russian passports for their kids would lose their parental rights.*”<sup>318</sup> Six witnesses also stated that acquiring Russian citizenship was closely linked to military registration, which put men at risk of being conscripted into the Russian armed forces.<sup>319</sup>
95. Moreover, a witness from Luhansk region explained how her mother, who didn’t want to acquire Russian citizenship, had to apply for a temporary residence permit in November 2024 to be allowed to stay in the occupied territories and be able to travel to the territories controlled by Ukraine. The same witness also stated how “*Everyone has to have a Russian passport by September 2025 or they risk being deported.*”<sup>320</sup> The witness was referring to a decree signed by the President of the Russian Federation on 20 March 2025, requiring Ukrainian citizens who fail to get Russian citizenship or register as foreigners to leave the Russian Federation and the occupied territories of Ukraine by 10 September 2025.<sup>321</sup>

313 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.551, paras. 18-21.

314 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.500, para. 13; UKR.WS.502, paras. 15; UKR.WS.505, para. 42; UKR.WS.539, para. 13; UKR.WS.566, para. 189; UKR.WS.576, para. 38.

315 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.556, para.26.

316 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.563, para. 20.

317 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.576, para. 37.

318 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.548, paras. 27-28. See also UKR.WS.493, para. 35.

319 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 57; UKR.WS.504, para. 10; UKR.WS.505, paras. 73-74; UKR.WS.509, para. 15; UKR.WS.550, para. 25; UKR.WS.552, para. 16. See also UKR.WS.548, para. 36; Section IV.e.ii. **Forced conscription and mobilization into the armed forces of the Russian Federation.**

320 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.563, paras. 8, 9, 20. See also UKR.WS.552, paras. 5, 13.

321 Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 20.03.2025 № 159 “Об особенностях правового положения отдельных категорий иностранных граждан и лиц без гражданства в Российской Федерации, изменении и признании утратившими силу некоторых указов Президента Российской Федерации [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 20.03.2025 No. 159 “On the specifics of the legal status of certain categories of foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Russian Federation, amendments and recognition of certain decrees of the President of the Russian Federation as invalid”], 20 March 2025, in Russian.

## *Grave and systematic changes related to education*

96. During interviews conducted in the first half of 2025, ODIHR continued to receive accounts,<sup>322</sup> including through 14 witness testimonies,<sup>323</sup> of grave and systematic changes related to the provision of education in the occupied territories of Ukraine. This included the imposition of a Russian curriculum and of military-patriotic education for children, confirming findings documented in previous Interim Reports.<sup>324</sup> For the first time, ODIHR also received first-hand accounts from former students from the occupied territories on the introduction of education programmes meant to instil Russian patriotism and encourage enlistment into the Russian armed forces.
97. Witnesses confirmed that, by 2025, the Russian education curriculum was already well-established across the occupied territories. No schools were allowed to teach the Ukrainian curriculum, and individual teachers who dared to do so online were persecuted, while students were also being checked for any possible attendance in Ukrainian education online. Students at Russian curriculum schools were able to choose Ukrainian as a study subject. However, some witnesses reported that, as of September 2024, this was no longer an option. In the first half of 2025, the pressure on parents to send their children to Russian curriculum schools continued, as well as on students to join Russian military-patriotic youth organizations.
98. NGOs told ODIHR that, in 2025, the number of cadet classes operating in the occupied territories had increased, especially in Crimea, while the patriotic component of education had started to be taught in kindergartens. According to reports, as from January 2025, FSB agents began visiting the parents of schoolchildren, instructing them to ensure that their children participate in militarized school activities and youth organizations. Around the same time, reports emerged of students' phones and tablets being checked by armed police and military officials at schools; they were looking for signs the children were attending Ukrainian education online.<sup>325</sup>

322 Information provided to ODIHR by six NGOs working on, among other IHRL and IHL issues, the education of children in the occupied territories; information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

323 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493; UKR.WS.496; UKR.WS.500; UKR.WS.504; UKR.WS.505; UKR.WS.511; UKR.WS.529; UKR.WS.547; UKR.WS.548; UKR.WS.552; UKR.WS.566; UKR.WS.569; UKR.WS.573; UKR.WS.576.

324 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Second Interim Report](#), paras. 83-86; [Fifth Interim Report](#), paras. 88-96; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 109-114.

325 See also [Militarization of Ukrainian children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine](#), Centre for Countering Disinformation, 16 January 2025; [What does the Year of the Defender of the Fatherland mean for the temporarily occupied territories?](#), Almenda, 2 February 2025; [Як окупанти мілітаризували дітей в Криму в 2024 році?](#) [How did the occupiers militarize children in Crimea in 2024?], Crimean Tatar Resource Centre, 11 February 2025, in Ukrainian; [The Russian Federation's Policy on the Eradication of Children's Identity in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine: 2024 Overview](#), Almenda, 24 March 2025.

99. Under IHL, an occupying power must respect the local legislation and institutions that existed at the beginning of the occupation unless absolutely prevented from doing so.<sup>326</sup> It must organize children’s education only where local institutions are inadequate and, where possible, this should be delivered by teachers of the same nationality, language and religion as the children.<sup>327</sup> An occupying power must further refrain from raising any obstacle to the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights, and the education of children separated from their parents must, as far as possible, be entrusted to people of a similar cultural tradition as their parents to “exclude any religious or political propaganda designed to wean children from their natural milieu”.<sup>328</sup> Moreover, under IHL, “it is forbidden to compel the inhabitants of occupied territory to swear allegiance to the hostile Power”.<sup>329</sup> Yet, the widespread replacement of the Ukrainian curriculum with that of the Russian Federation, along with the introduction of Russian military-patriotic education for school-aged children, appears to violate these principles and fundamentally alter the *status quo ante*.
100. Six witnesses interviewed by ODIHR described the imposition of the Russian curriculum in schools in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine,<sup>330</sup> explaining how the schools were forced to switch to the Russian state curriculum. New textbooks were brought from Russia, while Ukrainian textbooks were mostly thrown away and, in some cases, burned by the school staff who had agreed to collaborate.
101. Witnesses told ODIHR that some teachers agreed to teach the Russian curriculum,<sup>331</sup> while others refused,<sup>332</sup> with one witness from Kherson region stating, “*Some Ukrainian teachers switched to the Russian curriculum. Others were forced to, and those that refused had to leave.*”<sup>333</sup> A teacher from Kherson region explained how the FSB, armed men and local residents who cooperated with the Russian authorities talked to teachers, insisting that they stay to teach the Russian curriculum and arbitrarily detaining school staff who refused to cooperate.<sup>334</sup> Another witness from the same region said that the school director was fired for being pro-Ukrainian, while the other teachers were told, “*You can either stay and teach the Russian curriculum and get your salary, or you will not be employed.*”<sup>335</sup>

326 Hague Regulations (1907), art. 43. See further GC IV, art. 64, which allows for derogation from local legislation only for security reasons or where such legislation is an obstacle to the application of IHL, or where it is “essential” to “maintain the orderly government in the territory”.

327 GC IV, art. 50(3).

328 GC IV, art. 24. See also Jean S. Pictet, Commentary to the Fourth Geneva Convention (1958), art. 24, p. 188.

329 Hague Regulations (1907), art. 45.

330 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.500, para. 9; UKR.WS.505, paras. 58-59; UKR.WS.511, para. 8; UKR.WS.547, para. 17; UKR.WS.548, paras. 8, 12; UKR.WS.569, paras. 27, 35, 37.

331 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 35; UKR.WS.500, para. 9; UKR.WS.566, para. 79; UKR.WS.569, para. 37.

332 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.493, para. 41; UKR.WS.529, para. 5; UKR.WS.569, para. 32.

333 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.511, para. 8.

334 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.569, paras. 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 46, 48. See also UKR.WS.576, para. 45.

335 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.505, paras. 58-59.

102. Four witnesses stated that children’s attendance at Russian curriculum schools was mandatory, and that school directors, teachers and even armed men with assault rifles visited parents to either pressure or threaten them to send their children to Russian curriculum schools. Witnesses also reported that parents were threatened with deprivation of parental rights and informed that their children would be taken from them to be sent to Crimea or Russia if they refused to make them attend Russian curriculum schools.<sup>336</sup> Additionally, a witness from Kherson region reported that parents were also visited by the military to be pressured to send their children to universities in Russia instead of in Ukraine.<sup>337</sup> Three witnesses noted that, whenever possible, parents were hiding their children at home, while telling everyone that they moved somewhere else, not to be forced to attend Russian curriculum schools.<sup>338</sup> Moreover, two witnesses shared with ODIHR that the primary reason why they left the occupied territories was not to send their children to Russian schools.<sup>339</sup>
103. Seven witnesses stated that, whenever possible, children were attending online education in Ukrainian in secret.<sup>340</sup> A student from Kherson clarified that *“Many [Ukrainian teachers] continued to teach the Ukrainian curriculum online [in secret] from the occupied territories. Some children would go to the Russian school during the day and then connect online with these teachers after school in secret.”*<sup>341</sup> The witness further explained an instance when the Russian authorities found out that some teachers were conducting Ukrainian classes online, and *“The Russian forces went to the houses of the Ukrainian teachers, who were beaten up and their phones and textbooks were confiscated.”*<sup>342</sup> Another survivor from the same region told ODIHR that he was arbitrarily detained for eight and a half months, during which time he was tortured and starved, on suspicion that his wife, who was a teacher, was planning to open an underground Ukrainian school.<sup>343</sup>
104. Five witnesses spoke about children being sent, or encouraged by the Russian authorities to attend recreational camps in Crimea throughout 2024.<sup>344</sup> There, according to one witness, children were forced to join the Russian military-patriotic youth organization Young Army (‘Yunarmiya’).<sup>345</sup> Similarly, a student from Kherson region stated that the Russian authorities were encouraging

336 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 35; UKR.WS.505, para. 64; UKR.WS.548, para. 11; UKR.WS.566, para. 84.

337 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.511, para. 8.

338 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.505, para. 65; UKR.WS.552, para. 18; UKR.WS.566, para. 84.

339 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.511, para. 5; UKR.WS.548, paras. 32-33.

340 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 37; UKR.WS.505, para. 65; UKR.WS.511, para. 6; UKR.WS.547, para. 17; UKR.WS.548, para. 8; UKR.WS.569, para. 22; UKR.WS.572, para. 30.

341 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.505, para. 62. See also UKR.WS.548, para. 19; UKR.WS.529, paras. 4-7.

342 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.505, para. 63. See also UKR.WS.569 para. 40.

343 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.496, paras. 8, 10.

344 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 36; UKR.WS.504, paras. 17, 20, 25; UKR.WS.505, para. 67; UKR.WS.547, para. 19; UKR.WS.569, paras. 38-39.

345 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.504, paras. 16, 18.

students aged 15-16 to join the Youth Army ('Yunarmiya') and the Russian patriotic youth organization, 'Movement of the First' ('Dvizheniye pervyh').<sup>346</sup>

105. Five witnesses interviewed by ODIHR, including former students, explained the changes applied to schools in the occupied territories and the military-patriotic component that was introduced. Schools were decorated with Russian flags, as well as portraits of the President of the Russian Federation and Russian soldiers. Students had to start classes every Monday by singing the Russian national anthem, while, during celebrations, school choirs would sing Russian patriotic songs, and students would be dressed in military uniforms and insignia. Additionally, education programmes to instil Russian patriotism were widely implemented. Students were taught about the objectives of the 'Special Military operation' and its importance,<sup>347</sup> while *"All lectures would be dismissive of Ukraine, as a Fascist State that needed to be denazified."*<sup>348</sup>
106. A student from Zaporizhzhia region explained to ODIHR that there was a school subject called 'Russia my Horizon', taught twice per week, during which students talked about Russia, its culture and history. *"We had one class at school starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the class of the Russian national guard",* while *"Starting from 10<sup>th</sup> grade, [...] they were even teaching kids how to use guns [...]."*<sup>349</sup> Moreover, as from the academic year 2024/2025, the Ukrainian language was entirely removed from the curriculum.<sup>350</sup> A witness from Kherson region added that *"The kids at school were put under pressure if they had pro-Ukrainian views, and there were efforts to erase the Ukrainian language."*<sup>351</sup>
107. Witnesses also shared accounts with ODIHR about the militarization of children in schools that was designed to encourage them as young adults to join the Russian armed forces. On that point, a student from Crimea explained that students had *"classes to study military equipment. Soldiers [...] would often come to the school and give lectures [...] We were given assault rifles for assembly and disassembly."* Additionally, students were offered the opportunity to join *"a young army movement in the school, like cadets",* where students wore military-style uniforms. The witness also stated that *"boys from the age of 16 were encouraged to consider joining the Russian military, which was being continually glorified. They had to register with the military office when they turned 16. Some of them thought it would be cool to join the army [...] I know one boy [who was studying at the same school] who is in the Russian army on the frontlines"*.<sup>352</sup>

346 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.505, para. 61.

347 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 37, 41; UKR.WS.505, para. 60; UKR.WS.548, para. 18; UKR.WS.573, paras. 5, 10, 12, 16.

348 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.573, para. 5.

349 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.548, para. 15.

350 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.548, paras. 12, 14, 15.

351 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.511, para. 8.

352 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.573, paras.10, 11, 14. See also UKR.WS.548, para. 19.

## Forced conscription and mobilization into the armed forces of the Russian Federation

108. During the first half of 2025, ODIHR continued to receive accounts,<sup>353</sup> including through 13 witness testimonies,<sup>354</sup> of the forced conscription and mobilization of Ukrainian civilians into the Russian armed forces, confirming findings outlined in previous Interim Reports.<sup>355</sup> Nine of the 13 witnesses spoke about more recent developments that occurred from the second half of 2024 until February 2025. For the first time, ODIHR also received witness accounts of Ukrainian civilians being injured and killed after being conscripted into the Russian armed forces, as well as of the enlistment of prisoners in exchange for amnesty.
109. There is a clear prohibition under IHL against compelling inhabitants of an occupied territory to swear allegiance to the occupying power,<sup>356</sup> as well as against compelling civilians to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces, including through the use of propaganda aimed at securing voluntary enlistment.<sup>357</sup> The conscription of residents of an occupied territory into the armed forces of the occupying authority constitutes a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a war crime.<sup>358</sup> While it remains the prerogative of States to conscript their own nationals, given the widespread reports of forced imposition of Russian citizenship on residents of the occupied territories,<sup>359</sup> instances in which Ukrainian men were forced to acquire Russian citizenship and then subsequently conscripted should be understood as forced conscription.
110. Seven witnesses described instances of forced conscription and/or mobilization of civilians from the occupied territories into the Russian armed forces or forces under its command in the period from the summer of 2022 until October 2024.<sup>360</sup> According to a witness from Luhansk region,<sup>361</sup> conscripts, including university students and people under 25, were usually taken for six months to police the newly occupied territories and operate checkpoints. Some were sent to combat units thereafter. Many of these conscripts returned home with injuries sustained on the battlefield. According to the witness, this practice was

353 Information provided to ODIHR by six NGOs working on human rights and humanitarian law issues in the occupied territories; Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

354 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493; UKR.WS.501; UKR.WS.502; UKR.WS.504; UKR.WS.505; UKR.WS.509; UKR.WS.511; UKR.WS.533; UKR.WS.550; UKR.WS.551; UKR.WS.552; UKR.WS.558; UKR.WS.570.

355 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Second Interim Report](#), paras. 64-68; [Third Interim Report](#), para. 95; [Fourth Interim Report](#), para. 78; [Fifth Interim Report](#), paras. 97-104; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 115-120.

356 Hague Regulations (1907), art. 45.

357 GC IV, art. 51.

358 GC IV, art. 147; ICC Statute, art. 8(2)(a)(v).

359 For more details, see Section IV.e.i.(a). Forced adoption of Russian citizenship.

360 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.501, paras. 16, 22, 25; UKR.WS.502, para. 25; UKR.WS.505, paras. 71, 72, 73; UKR.WS.511, para. 10; UKR.WS.533, para. 16; UKR.WS.550, para. 25; UKR.WS.570, para. 5. See also UKR.WS.548, para. 36.

361 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.501, paras. 16, 22, 25.

ongoing at the time he left the occupied territories in October 2024. Moreover, a witness from Crimea explained how an acquaintance of his was mobilized in 2024 and *“was wounded on his leg on the frontline shortly after his mobilization. He recovered a little, maybe for a month, and they forcibly took him back into service.”*<sup>362</sup>

111. Additionally, six witnesses described to ODIHR that the Russian authorities were offering enlistment into the Russian armed forces to prisoners in exchange for a reduction in their prison sentences or amnesty.<sup>363</sup> A former Ukrainian POW who was held in a prison in Luhansk region stated how *“The regular prisoners were recruited by the Russian army. There was a visit from recruiters. There were about 70 people who were taken by the Russian military, voluntarily [sent to Bakhmut in August 2022]. All but two died after two weeks.”* Recruiters continued coming to the prison until May 2023, but the number of volunteers reduced and eventually stopped due to the high casualty rate. *“They were promised amnesty after six months of service.”*<sup>364</sup> Similarly, a witness from Crimea told ODIHR that, in February 2025 during a court hearing regarding a case against his brother, the judge told his brother *“You have two options: go to jail for up to two years or join the military as part of the special military operation.”*<sup>365</sup>
112. Six witnesses interviewed by ODIHR described the link between military registration, which could lead to conscription, and Russian citizenship.<sup>366</sup> A witness from Kherson region stated *“When they issued Russian passports to male citizens, they would immediately give them a conscription notice to show up for military registration”*,<sup>367</sup> with another witness from Donetsk region adding *“A neighbour of mine, a young man, was taken to the military commissariat after he received his passport in 2024.”*<sup>368</sup>
113. Two witnesses further described that men in the occupied territories were hiding to avoid being conscripted or mobilized,<sup>369</sup> with one of these witnesses going on to say how she witnessed young men aged 18 to 23 from Kherson region leaving the occupied territories to countries of the European Union via Russia in October 2024 as *“They were afraid of being conscripted because these were men who had been visited in their homes by military conscription officers.”*<sup>370</sup>

362 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.502, para. 25.

363 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.502, para. 24; UKR.WS.504, para. 9; UKR.WS.505, para. 72; UKR.WS.551, para. 26; UKR.WS.552, para. 16; UKR.WS.558, paras. 140-144.

364 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.558, paras. 140-144.

365 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.502, para. 24.

366 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 57; UKR.WS.504, para. 10; UKR.WS.505, paras. 73-74; UKR.WS.509, para. 15; UKR.WS.550, para. 25; UKR.WS.552, para. 16. See also UKR.WS.548, para. 36.

367 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.493, para. 57.

368 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.552, para. 16.

369 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.505, para.73; UKR.WS.570, para. 5.

370 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.505, paras. 82-83.

114. Two additional witnesses stated that the Russian authorities were offering financial incentives to join the Russian armed forces to civilians and former prisoners in the occupied territories.<sup>371</sup> Five witnesses reported to ODIHR that there were also cases of civilians voluntarily joining the Russian armed forces due to financial incentives or based on their own beliefs and convictions.<sup>372</sup>
115. Forced conscription and prosecutions for evading the draft were especially prevalent in occupied Crimea. According to the Ukrainian authorities, the Russian Federation had conducted six conscription campaigns in Crimea since February 2022, with a seventh currently under way. Around 18,800 people had been conscripted as of April 2025, with another 1,500 expected to be conscripted up until the end of July. Moreover, since February 2022, 274 cases had been filed in the courts in Crimea against individuals who evaded conscription for military service. At least 1,955 Russian soldiers from units based in occupied Crimea have been killed, of whom 1,296 are believed to have been Ukrainian citizens.<sup>373</sup> In addition to Crimea, the forced recruitment of civilians was also reported to be taking place in other occupied regions of Ukraine and especially in the so-called ‘Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics’, which is believed to have included significantly more people than in Crimea.<sup>374</sup>

### Suppression of dissent

116. During the first half of 2025, ODIHR continued to receive accounts,<sup>375</sup> including through 12 witness testimonies,<sup>376</sup> of the use of judicial measures and ‘deportation’ to suppress real or perceived dissent by civilians in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, confirming the findings outlined in previous Interim Reports.<sup>377</sup>
117. Three witnesses interviewed by ODIHR said that the Russian authorities were prosecuting civilians on trumped-up charges to suppress dissent among residents in the occupied territories,<sup>378</sup> with various reported violations of the

371 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.501, para. 22; UKR.WS.551, para. 26.

372 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, para. 57; UKR.WS.501, para. 22; UKR.WS.511, para. 10; UKR.WS.551, para. 26; UKR.WS.552, para. 16.

373 *Оперативна інформація щодо ситуації на тимчасово окупованій території Автономної Республіки Крим та міста Севастополя станом на 2 червня 2025 року* [Operational information on the situation in the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as of 2 June 2025], Представництво Президента України в Автономній Республіці Крим [Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea], 2 June 2025, in Ukrainian.

374 Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

375 Information provided to ODIHR by ten NGOs working on IHRL and IHL issues in the occupied territories; Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

376 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493; UKR.WS.502; UKR.WS.503; UKR.WS.505; UKR.WS.511; UKR.WS.530; UKR.WS.537; UKR.WS.552; UKR.WS.554; UKR.WS.567; UKR.WS.573; UKR.WS.575.

377 See OSCE/ODIHR, *First Interim Report*, paras. 106-111; *Second Interim Report*, paras. 146-150; *Third Interim Report*, paras. 42, 84-89; *Fourth Interim Report*, paras. 43, 86-88, 96-100; *Fifth Interim Report*, para. 34; *Sixth Interim Report*, paras. 41, 121-124.

378 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.552, paras. 14, 35; UKR.WS.537, para. 22; UKR.WS.567, para. 4.

right to a fair trial.<sup>379</sup> Three witnesses stated that civilians with pro-Ukrainian views were being prosecuted based on forced testimonies.<sup>380</sup> Witnesses also reported cases of arbitrary detentions, as well as forcing civilians to make video apologies on camera for their real or perceived pro-Ukrainian views.<sup>381</sup>

118. Two witnesses shared accounts of their relatives being prosecuted on trumped-up charges for their perceived support for Ukraine. A witness from Luhansk shared how her husband was detained in August 2022, charged with espionage and sentenced to 19 years of imprisonment in January 2023. Reportedly, this occurred because *“he often expressed a pro-Ukrainian position online”*, with his lawyer stressing that *“appealing would be pointless, since the same judge would preside over the case”*.<sup>382</sup> Another witness from Zaporizhzhia region told ODIHR that her father was detained in October 2023, charged with terrorism and sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment in January 2025. *“My father was pro Ukrainian and patriotic, [...] he flew a Ukrainian flag from the roof of his house [before the occupation]”*. When he was detained at a checkpoint and brought back home for a house search, the soldiers found a Ukrainian flag and the Ukrainian trident symbol in his home.<sup>383</sup> A priest from Kherson region told ODIHR that he was arbitrarily detained for nine months for his pro-Ukrainian views, which he expressed in church. He stated, *“I am Ukrainian. I spoke Ukrainian, and I was vocal about not supporting Russia. [...] During sermons in church, I was saying that it’s a sin to kill, and that we were invaded by the enemy.”* He told ODIHR that he was tortured and starved while in detention and was accused of not supporting the occupation.<sup>384</sup>
119. Additionally, a survivor from Zaporizhzhia region reported how she was detained and deported for her posts on social media. In October 2023, she *“found on the Internet a Telegram channel called Yellow Ribbon, which is a pro-Ukrainian movement. I took a picture in my town with a Ukrainian flag in the background and shared this photo with the channel.”* After this, in February 2024, she was detained and informed that her posts on Yellow Ribbon had been tracked down. She was taken to court, forced to make an apology on camera and sentenced for violating the curfew, even though she hadn’t. After around two months of detention, she was released and charged again, this time with discrediting the Russian armed forces. In February 2025, based on the last verdict rendered, she was deported to Georgia and given a ban on entering

379 For more details, see Section IV.f. **Trials of Ukrainian civilians and POWs by the Russian authorities.**

380 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.503, para. 28; UKR.WS.511, para. 17; UKR.WS.530, para. 44. See also Section IV.f. **Trials of Ukrainian civilians and POWs by the Russian authorities.**

381 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.493, paras. 11-13; UKR.WS.496, paras. 7, 16-17; UKR.WS.502, para. 18; UKR.WS.545, para. 5; UKR.WS.550, paras. 4, 8, 18; UKR.WS.552, para. 29; UKR.WS.554, para.5; UKR.WS.573, para. 8; UKR.WS.575, paras. 12-13, 19. For more details, see Section IV.a. **Arbitrary deprivation of liberty and enforced disappearances in areas under the control of the Russian authorities** Section IV.b. **Torture and ill-treatment in areas under the control of the Russian authorities.**

382 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.537, paras. 6, 8-11, 15, 22, 26.

383 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.567, paras. 4-7, 15.

384 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.496, paras. 7, 13. See also Section IV.b. **Torture and ill-treatment in areas under the control of the Russian authorities.**

the Russian Federation and the occupied territories of Ukraine until 2069.<sup>385</sup> According to the Ukrainian authorities, 1,350 cases of “discrediting the Russian armed forces” were filed in courts in Crimea from April 2022 to May 2025,<sup>386</sup> representing an increase of 303 new cases since ODIHR’s Sixth Interim Report, showing the increased use of this measure by the Russian authorities.<sup>387</sup>

120. Two witnesses also reported that the Russian authorities were persecuting children for expressing pro-Ukrainian sentiment. A witness from Crimea told ODIHR that two police officers took her from school and brought her to the police station for questioning because *“I posted pro-Ukrainian views on my personal profile on social media [...] They told me that if I posted pro-Ukrainian views again, my grandmother would face a huge fine, 800.000-1.000.000 RUB.”* The witness went on to say, *“I was among the first to be interviewed by the police for posting my views, but not the last. [...] Some had to apologize on camera, which was later shown in public. Some had to sing the Russian National Anthem, which was also recorded.”* After that she was visited at home by police every three months, during which time her phones would be checked for posts, and she would be asked about her loyalty to Russia.<sup>388</sup>
121. NGOs provided information to ODIHR that the Russian authorities actively prosecuted human rights activists, as well as professional and citizen journalists in occupied Crimea when they dared to express anti-war or pro-Ukrainian views. Individuals were subjected to home searches, interrogations, arrests and criminal charges. Additionally, Crimean Tatars were often targeted and deprived of liberty for their religious beliefs or participation in religious organizations declared terrorist or extremist by the Russian Federation, although they do not have that status under Ukrainian law.<sup>389</sup>

385 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.552, paras. 25-30, 35, 39.

386 [Оперативна інформація щодо ситуації на тимчасово окупованій території Автономної Республіки Крим та міста Севастополя станом на 2 червня 2025 року](#) [Operational information on the situation in the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as of 2 June 2025], Представництво Президента України в Автономній Республіці Крим [Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea], 2 June 2025, in Ukrainian.

387 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 122.

388 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.573, paras. 6-9. See also UKR.WS.505, para. 39.

389 See also [Аналіз порушень прав людини в окупованому Криму за 2024 рік](#) [Analysis of human rights violations in occupied Crimea for 2024], Crimean Tatar Resource Centre (CTRC), 16 January 2025, in Ukrainian; [Human Rights and international humanitarian law norms: Crimea 2024 situation review](#), Crimean Human Rights Group (CHRG), 5 February 2025; [Аналіз порушень прав людини в окупованому Криму за I квартал 2025 року](#) [Analysis of human rights violations in occupied Crimea for the first quarter of 2025], CTCR, 15 April 2025, in Ukrainian; [Review on the human rights situation in Crimea January-March 2025](#), CHRG, 18 April 2025; [Crimea Situation Reports](#), Crimea SOS.

## F. TRIALS OF UKRAINIAN CIVILIANS AND POWS BY THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES

122. During the first half of 2025, ODIHR received accounts, including through 18 witness testimonies,<sup>390</sup> regarding unfair trials of Ukrainian civilians and POWs by the Russian authorities in conflict-related cases. Information collected by ODIHR on trials of Ukrainian civilians and POWs details how the Russian authorities prosecuted individuals on trumped-up charges of terrorism, murder, espionage, sabotage, cruel treatment of POWs or civilians and the intentional destruction or damage to property.<sup>391</sup> The number of trials is reportedly on the rise.<sup>392</sup> In 2025, ODIHR was told of a far greater number of trials against Ukrainian civilians and POWs than previously during the armed conflict. As of June 2025, the Ukrainian authorities had reported 615 such criminal prosecutions by the Russian authorities of Ukrainian civilians for terrorism or espionage offences and 857 trials of Ukrainian POWs facing war crimes (i.e., the use of prohibited means and methods of warfare), terrorism or espionage charges.<sup>393</sup>
123. Under IHL, wilfully depriving POWs of a fair and regular trial is a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and amounts to a war crime.<sup>394</sup> IHL further requires trials of the civilian population from occupied territories to be held on said occupied territory.<sup>395</sup> Prosecuting Ukrainian civilians under the provisions of the Russian Criminal Code is, in any event, in violation of IHL. The Russian authorities are prescribed to govern the occupied territories of Ukraine by the penal laws in place prior to occupation insofar that these do not constitute a threat to the occupying power's security or an obstacle to the application of GC IV.<sup>396</sup>

390 In relation to trials of civilians, see ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.511; UKR.WS.521; UKR.WS.528; UKR.WS.530; UKR.WS.532; UKR.WS.533; UKR.WS.537; UKR.WS.541; UKR.WS.549. On trials of POWs, see ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495; UKR.WS.507; UKR.WS.508; UKR.WS.510; UKR.WS.518; UKR.WS.519; UKR.WS.557; UKR.WS.568; UKR.WS.571.

391 For instance, see [Приговоренный к 20 годам пленный боец «Азова» Александр Максимчук рассказал о пытках в СИЗО Таганрога](#) [Azov fighter Oleksandr Maksymchuk, sentenced to 20 years, told about torture in Taganrog pre-trial detention centre], Медиазона [Mediazona], 12 December 2024, in Russian; [Дело 24-х. Как пытали, судили и обменивали пленных украинцев из «Азова»](#) [Case of 24. How the captured Ukrainians from Azov were tortured, tried and exchanged], Медиазона [Mediazona], 26 March 2025, in Russian; [У Росії засудили п'ятьох українських військовополонених за нібито тероризм](#) [Russia sentences five Ukrainian prisoners of war for alleged terrorism], ZMINA, 14 February 2025, in Ukrainian; [94% українських військовополонених, засуджених в РФ, звинувачують у тероризмі](#) [94% of Ukrainian prisoners of war convicted in Russia are accused of terrorism], Медійна ініціатива за права людини [Media Initiative for Human Rights], 23 April 2025, in Ukrainian; [Відмова в праві на справедливий суд як міжнародний злочин під час війни Росії проти України: контекст, практика, право та перспективи](#) [Denial of the right to a fair trial as an international crime during Russia's war against Ukraine: context, practice, law and prospects], ZMINA, Медійна ініціатива за права людини [Media Initiative for Human Rights], 2025, in Ukrainian. See also information provided to ODIHR by a human rights defender working on the issues of Ukrainian civilian detainees and POWs.

392 Information provided to ODIHR by an NGO working on the issues of war crimes investigation and human rights advocacy.

393 Information provided to ODIHR by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna.

394 GC III, art. 99; ICC Statute, art. 8(2)(a)(vi).

395 GC IV, art. 66.

396 GC IV, art. 64.

124. Witnesses told ODIHR that civilians were often first detained under false pretexts. For instance, detention occurred for “*resisting the Special Military Operation*”,<sup>397</sup> Thereafter, civilians were charged with offences such as terrorism<sup>398</sup> espionage,<sup>399</sup> “*giving false testimonies regarding acts of terrorism*”<sup>400</sup> or state treason.<sup>401</sup> ODIHR received 14 testimonies regarding Ukrainian civilians being subjected to, often prolonged, arbitrary detention before being charged with or convicted of the aforementioned criminal offences.<sup>402</sup> At least six witnesses specified how detainees, civilians and POWs alike, were transferred to the territory of the Russian Federation for criminal prosecution.<sup>403</sup> Moreover, ODIHR notes that charges brought against civilians often appear trumped up, with witnesses indicating that prosecutions were brought to punish people for perceived pro-Ukrainian views.<sup>404</sup>
125. Six POWs were charged with miscellaneous articles of the Russian Criminal Code that are formally unrelated to the conduct of hostilities: “dismantling the constitutional order”,<sup>405</sup> “attempt to overthrow the government”<sup>406</sup> and various terrorism charges<sup>407</sup> (including participation in the ‘Azov’ regiment, labelled a terrorist organization in the Russian Federation).<sup>408</sup> The legitimacy of related prosecutions can be impeached, as these appear to target Ukrainian POWs for mere participation in the hostilities, in blatant disregard of combatant immunity.<sup>409</sup>
126. Two former POWs informed ODIHR that the Russian authorities accused them of violating IHL. One had been charged with murdering civilians,<sup>410</sup> while the other was confronted with similar “attempted murder” charges.<sup>411</sup> Both indicated that their criminal cases were fabricated,<sup>412</sup> including by reliance on false witness testimonies, and that the accused were not allowed to present any witnesses to refute the prosecution witnesses.<sup>413</sup> These accounts correspond

397 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.552, para. 14 (detention occurred and charges were brought after the victim refused to collaborate with occupation authorities).

398 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.511, para. 16; UKR.WS.521, para. 5; UKR.WS.528, para. 29.

399 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.530, para. 20; UKR.WS.532, para. 45; UKR.WS.537, para. 22.

400 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.533, para. 32.

401 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.549, para. 15.

402 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.503, paras. 43-46; UKR.WS.504, paras. 28, 51; UKR.WS.511, paras. 15-18; UKR.WS.521, paras. 5-6; UKR.WS.528, paras. 29, 41, 52; UKR.WS.530, paras. 20, 22-24, 30-33; UKR.WS.532, paras. 40, 45, 53; UKR.WS.533, paras. 32, 41-42, 44; UKR.WS.537, paras. 22, 26; UKR.WS.549, para. 15; UKR.WS.560, paras. 28, 32-33, 56-57, 64; UKR.WS.567, paras. 4, 15; UKR.WS.572, paras. 51, 74, 76, 103, 111; UKR.WS.576, paras. 19-20, 25, 30-31. See also UKR.WS.496, paras. 42-43; UKR.WS.528, paras. 32-34.

403 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.503, para. 17; UKR.WS.530, paras. 16, 30, 32; UKR.WS.533, paras. 41, 44; UKR.WS.560, paras. 30-32; UKR.WS.567, para. 14; UKR.WS.576, para. 26.

404 For more details, see Section IV.e.iii. **Suppression of dissent.**

405 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495 para. 44; UKR.WS.507, para. 7.

406 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495 para. 44; UKR.WS.507, para. 7; UKR.WS.508, para. 71.

407 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.507, para. 7; UKR.WS.508, para. 71; UKR.WS.518, para. 34; UKR.WS.557, para. 102; UKR.WS.568, para. 33; UKR.WS.571, para. 45.

408 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.508, para. 71.

409 See also AP I, art. 43(2); [Commentary on the GC III](#), ICRC, 2020, para. 20.

410 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 118; UKR.WS.519, para. 11.

411 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.519, para. 11.

412 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 118; UKR.WS.519, para. 11.

413 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.510, para. 118.

to the trends communicated to ODIHR by human rights defenders working in the area.<sup>414</sup> Survivors described being threatened and tortured by the Russian authorities in order to obtain their confessions.<sup>415</sup> One survivor also recalled an instance where she was forced to sign documents without reading them first.<sup>416</sup>

127. Ten witnesses indicated that they or their family members on trial had state-appointed lawyers.<sup>417</sup> Eight of them were dissatisfied with the quality of the legal work of their attorneys,<sup>418</sup> stating that the lawyers did not discuss the case with them,<sup>419</sup> treated their work as a formality,<sup>420</sup> asked relatives to pay them privately in return for better quality work (even though legal aid is provided for free),<sup>421</sup> and refused to appeal a judgment because it is “*pointless*”.<sup>422</sup> One of those witnesses even described how the state-appointed lawyer sided with the prosecution, saying that she would encourage the imposition of the death penalty on her client since “*it would be better for everyone and humanity [...] as then he will be dead*”.<sup>423</sup> Additionally, one survivor described neither having been granted access to a lawyer nor being present at their own trial.<sup>424</sup>
128. Witnesses also explained how independent Russian lawyers often feared for their security because of their involvement in conflict-related criminal cases,<sup>425</sup> reporting that lawyers faced disbarment or pressure on their families, or some had even had to flee the country to escape persecution.<sup>426</sup> Lawyers working on the cases of Ukrainian civilians and POWs confirmed these findings, further noting a reluctance to work in the occupied areas out of fear of prosecution by the Ukrainian authorities for illegally crossing the border from Russia to the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.<sup>427</sup> ODIHR also received information on

414 Information provided to ODIHR by a human rights defender working on the issues of Ukrainian civilian detainees and POWs.

415 In relation to threats made to obtain confessions: ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 118; UKR.WS.568, para. 18. On instances of torture for the same purpose: ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, paras. 48-49; UKR.WS.508, para. 19; UKR.WS.511, para. 17; UKR.WS.519, para. 11; UKR.WS.530, para. 44. See also Section IV.b. **Torture and ill-treatment in areas under the control of the Russian authorities.**

416 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.495, para. 13.

417 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 68; UKR.WS.507, para. 19; UKR.WS.508, para. 15; UKR.WS.510, para. 111; UKR.WS.519, para. 15; UKR.WS.528, para. 32; UKR.WS.532, para. 47; UKR.WS.533, para. 34; UKR.WS.549, para. 22; UKR.WS.568, para. 28.

418 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 68; UKR.WS.507, para. 19; UKR.WS.510, para. 111; UKR.WS.519, para. 15; UKR.WS.549, para. 22; UKR.WS.533, para. 34; UKR.WS.537, para. 26.

419 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.507, para. 19.

420 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.495, para. 68; UKR.WS.510, para. 120; UKR.WS.519, para. 15; UKR.WS.549, para. 22.

421 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.533, para. 34.

422 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.510, para. 149; UKR.WS.537, para. 26.

423 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.508, para. 63.

424 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.557, paras. 102, 105.

425 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.508, para. 105.

426 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.511, para. 17; UKR.WS.521, para. 8.

427 Information provided to ODIHR by a human rights defender working on the issues of Ukrainian civilian detainees and POWs; Information provided to ODIHR by an NGO defending the rights of Ukrainian civilian detainees and POWs imprisoned in the Russian Federation.

lawyers' lack of access to their clients,<sup>428</sup> including cases where the accused had to dismiss their lawyers under pressure from the Russian authorities.<sup>429</sup>

129. Finally, witnesses described how lawyers working on criminal cases of Ukrainian civilians and POWs often take on more of a monitoring role, getting packages and parcels to their clients, arranging meetings between the relatives and the accused, protecting clients from being mistreated, or simply obtaining information on their whereabouts.<sup>430</sup> This corroborates information from human rights defenders working in this field that the effect of legal work on these trials is severely limited, with cases highly politicized and without a single acquittal to date.<sup>431</sup>
130. ODIHR expresses concern over spurious prosecutions and reported violations of fair trial guarantees and urges full compliance with IHL and IHRL standards regarding any potential cases brought against civilians or POWs.

## **G. COERCED COOPERATION WITH THE OCCUPYING POWER AND ACCUSATIONS OF COLLABORATION**

131. ODIHR received nine testimonies in which witnesses raised the issue of coerced cooperation or accusations of collaboration, all of which confirm previous findings.<sup>432</sup> Witnesses described the Russian authorities promising material benefits or better treatment in detention in exchange for cooperation,<sup>433</sup> often amounting to the identification of fellow residents to be targeted by the Russian authorities. One witness, speaking about the activities of people cooperating with the authorities in occupied areas, explained how his son was denounced to the occupying authorities for his pro-Ukrainian position, resulting in his detention.<sup>434</sup> Similarly, a witness with pro-Ukrainian views recounted how an individual cooperating with the Russian authorities warned him “*about his attitude*” and later tried to apprehend him.<sup>435</sup>
132. Simultaneously, the Russian authorities continued to pressure those who refuse to cooperate with them.<sup>436</sup> One witness described how his relative was

428 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.528, para. 39; UKR.WS.541, paras. 38, 39.

429 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.521, para. 7; UKR.WS.528, para. 36.

430 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.507, para. 26; UKR.WS.508, para. 99; UKR.WS.518, para. 39; UKR.WS.568, para. 28; UKR.WS.528, para. 35; UKR.WS.532, paras. 51, 54; UKR.WS.533, para. 34; UKR.WS.537, paras 21, 23.

431 Information provided to ODIHR by a human rights defender working on the issues of Ukrainian civilian detainees and POWs; Information provided to ODIHR by an NGO defending the rights of Ukrainian civilian detainees and POWs imprisoned in the Russian Federation.

432 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.492; UKR.WS.505; UKR.WS.517; UKR.WS.525; UKR.WS.533; UKR.WS.545; UKR.WS.556; UKR.WS.563; UKR.WS.566. See OSCE/ODIHR, [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 107; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 126.

433 ODIHR Witness Interviews UKR.WS.525, para. 25; UKR.WS.563, para. 6.

434 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.545, para. 5.

435 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.556, paras. 5, 8.

436 See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 109; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 126, 128.

instructed not to leave occupied territory after she refused to cooperate,<sup>437</sup> while another testified to being detained after refusing to cooperate.<sup>438</sup> Such pressures must be kept in mind, since stigmatizing narratives about residents of the areas under Russian control persist in Government-controlled areas of Ukraine, with “*the Ukrainian authorities treat[ing] us all as collaborators and traitors.*”<sup>439</sup> Initiatives such as ‘I want to go to my people’ (*Khochu k svoim*), which aims to exchange civilians convicted by the Ukrainian authorities of treason or collaboration for Ukrainians detained by the Russian authorities, add to these stigmatizing narratives by ‘othering’ the defendants.<sup>440</sup>

133. ODIHR continued to receive information about unfair prosecutions for ‘collaboration’ by the Ukrainian authorities. The information received was in line with the findings of previous Interim Reports.<sup>441</sup> There remained a lack of clarity about what constitutes collaboration. This is due to vaguely worded legislation, the reported failure of Ukrainian courts to adequately consider the direct intent of alleged perpetrators and whether coercion was used, and finally, the fact that prosecutions regularly target those performing services that may be considered essential for the residents of the Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine.<sup>442</sup> ODIHR is concerned that the residents of occupied areas may be unwilling to leave, despite threats to their liberty and security, due to fear of prosecution in Government-controlled territory of Ukraine. There have been 2,760 first-instance decisions on collaboration to date.<sup>443</sup>
134. Consistent with previous Interim Reports and open-source material, ODIHR received witness accounts detailing how the Ukrainian authorities prosecuted teachers and school administrators on collaboration charges for implementing Russian educational standards.<sup>444</sup> Under IHL, the occupying power must facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children with the cooperation of the national and local

437 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.563, para. 6.

438 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.552, para. 14.

439 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.545, para. 12. See also OSCE/ODIHR, [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 130.

440 Whereas the programme allows convicted individuals who so wish and qualify for exchange to leave Government-controlled areas of Ukraine, there are reportedly instances where convicted individuals appear pressured into entering the ‘exchange register’. See [Khochu k svoim](#) [I want to go to my people], Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War; Information provided to ODIHR by an NGO working on human rights and humanitarian law issues.

441 See OSCE/ODIHR, [Fifth Interim Report](#), paras. 106, 111, 112; [Sixth Interim Report](#), paras. 126, 129.

442 [Liability for collaborationism: how has judicial practice changed?](#), ZMINA, 2025; Information provided to ODIHR by an NGO focusing on human rights violations concerning the Russian occupation of Crimea.

443 [Єдиний державний реєстр судових рішень](#) [Unified State Register of Court Decisions].

444 ODIHR Witness Interview UKR.WS.545, paras. 11, 12. See also [Fifth Interim Report](#), para. 110; [Sixth Interim Report](#), para. 128; [Під час окупації Харківщині впроваджувала стандарти освіти рф: слідчі заочно повідомили жінці про підозру](#) [During the occupation of Kharkiv region implemented Russian educational standards: investigators informed a woman of the charges in absentia], Головне управління Національної поліції в Харківській області [Main Directorate of the National Police in Kharkiv Region], 25 January 2025, in Ukrainian; [Судитимуть освітянку, яка зайняла посаду декана факультету у захопленому окупантами херсонському університеті](#) [An educator who took up the position of dean of a faculty at a university in Kherson occupied by invaders will be tried], Херсонська обласна прокуратура [Kherson Regional Prosecutor’s Office] on Facebook, 25 February 2025, in Ukrainian.

authorities.<sup>445</sup> The occupying power furthermore has a right to compel civilians to work in jobs that are necessary to provide certain services to the population. This includes educators and school administrators to assist in upholding educational services. ODIHR is therefore concerned that the vagueness of the law criminalizing collaboration and its application in a manner inconsistent with IHL results in unfair prosecutions.

445 GC IV, art. 50(i).



# Updated Interim Recommendations

V

### **ODIHR calls on the Russian Federation and Ukraine as parties to the conflict to:**

- Respect and ensure respect for IHL and IHRL in territories under their control;
- Take all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event to minimize incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects;
- Cease the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in densely populated areas;
- Ensure unimpeded access to the International Committee of the Red Cross and other relevant organizations to all places where POWs are detained;
- Refrain from prosecuting POWs for the mere fact of having directly participated in hostilities;
- Ensure that all POWs are held in places of internment that fully comply with Geneva Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949; ensure they are treated with the full respect afforded to them under the Convention; and investigate and prosecute all cases of serious violations of IHL in relation to their treatment;
- Ensure that independent and impartial investigations are conducted into all allegations of serious violations of IHL and IHRL, including those committed by armed forces under parties' control, and that alleged perpetrators are brought to justice in fair trials in accordance with international law and standards; and
- Respect, protect and ensure the full enjoyment of fair trial guarantees for all individuals charged with crimes in relation to the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine.

### **ODIHR calls on the Russian Federation to:**

- Cease attacks on the energy infrastructure critical to the civilian population of Ukraine;
- Cease summary execution, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence against POWs and civilian detainees;
- Stop the practice of arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Ukrainian civilians, unconditionally release all those thus detained and provide all victims with effective remedies;

- Halt the incommunicado detention of individuals and immediately provide information on the whereabouts of detainees to their families and legal representatives;
- Ensure that legal safeguards for people deprived of their liberty are fully respected in accordance with IHRL and IHL;
- Ensure adequate conditions of internment for POWs and civilian detainees, including by granting regular, unimpeded and confidential access for independent monitors to all places (both in the occupied territory of Ukraine and in the Russian Federation) where protected people are interned or detained;
- Respect the main tenets of the law of occupation, and refrain from introducing irreversible changes to the status of Ukrainian territories under military occupation by imposing Russian political, legal, administrative, educational and social systems;
- Immediately cease pressuring or coercing the civilian population to change their nationality, and ensure that access to rights and services in occupied territories are not conditional upon the acquisition of Russian citizenship, including access to employment, pensions, social benefits, medical care, humanitarian aid, education, parental rights, property rights and freedom of movement;
- Immediately cease the practice of compelling Ukrainian nationals from occupied areas of Ukraine, including those with Russian citizenship, to serve in the armed forces of the Russian Federation;
- Immediately cease pressuring or coercing parents to send their children to Russian curriculum schools and stop imposing military-patriotic education for school-aged children;
- Immediately stop subjecting civilians in occupied territories, including Crimean Tatars, to prosecution for peacefully expressing their views and opinions; and
- Ensure the safe access and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.

#### **ODIHR calls on Ukraine to:**

- Amend its criminal legislation regarding ‘collaborative activity’ to dispel any legal uncertainty; provide prosecutorial guidelines that incorporate considerations of duress and lawful requisitions for work; and ensure that

any criminal proceedings against alleged collaborators adhere to all fair trial rights;

- Further improve communication with the families of civilians detained by the Russian Federation authorities; and
- Provide medical, psychological, social and other support to all civilians who have been released following arbitrary detention by the Russian Federation (and their families), especially those who have been subjected to conflict-related sexual violence and other types of torture.

**ODIHR calls on OSCE participating States to:**

- Ensure that rehabilitation, medical, psychological, social and other support is available to all Ukrainian former detainees on their territory, emphasizing help for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and other types of torture;
- Enhance cross-state cooperation between domestic law enforcement and criminal justice authorities, ensuring the effective investigation and prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and torture committed against arbitrarily detained civilians and prisoners of war; and
- Support and fund civil society in providing humanitarian assistance, documenting violations of IHL and IHRL, and/or contributing to related accountability efforts.

