

REPORT

ON THE RESULTS OF MONITORING



**ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN CERTAIN
TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES
OF UKRAINE (CRIMEA, PARTS OF
ZAPORIZHZHIA AND KHERSON OBLASTS)**

REPORT

on the results of monitoring

Enforced disappearances in certain temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine (Crimea, parts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts)

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ABSTRACT

This report is dedicated to analyzing the practice of enforced disappearances of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine – the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as parts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts.

The study covers the period from 2014, with a particular focus on events following the onset of the full-scale armed aggression in 2022, when the scale and intensity of this practice increased significantly.

The report examines the mechanics of enforced disappearances – from the identification and detention of individuals to their complete isolation, torture, concealment of information, and the subsequent "legalization" of detention. Special attention is given to the role of security forces, the infrastructure of places of detention, and the impact of disappearances on the families of victims. The findings are based on documented individual cases, expert interviews with representatives of organizations that work specifically in the area of "enforced disappearances", analysis of open-source information, video materials, and official responses from authorities.

The report provides a legal assessment of documented facts in accordance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international criminal law, and analyzes the compliance of the actions of the Russian Federation (as the occupying power) with its own legislation. It also examines Ukraine's national response mechanisms and their effectiveness in countering these crimes.

Based on the analysis conducted, key findings, recommendations, and demands have been formulated, aimed at ending the practice of enforced disappearances, ensuring access to truth and justice, holding perpetrators accountable, and providing appropriate support to victims and their families.

The report is intended to serve as a tool for comprehensive and effective documentation and classification of these acts as international crimes, as well as to facilitate national and international advocacy efforts to end the practice of enforced disappearances in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARC – Autonomous Republic of Crimea

VR – Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

DPS – Road Patrol Service

ITT – Temporary Detention Facility

CC RF – Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

CC of Ukraine – Criminal Code of Ukraine

CHRG – Crimean Human Rights Group

ICC – International Criminal Court

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine

IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency

UN – United Nations

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

RF – Russian Federation

SBU – Security Service of Ukraine

SMO – "special military operation" (the official term used by the Russian authorities to refer to the armed aggression against Ukraine)

SIZO – pre-trial detention center

FSB of the Russian Federation – the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, including the so-called "FSB Directorate for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol," "FSB Border Service Directorate," etc.

FSIN of the Russian Federation – Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation

ZNPP – Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant

ZMINA – ZMINA Human Rights Center

OSINT – Open Source Intelligence (intelligence based on publicly available information)

In this report, certain terms and formulations used in the official practice of the Russian Federation may be applied solely for the purpose of simplifying the comprehension of the material and identifying the relevant structures or administrative units. The use of such terminology in no way implies recognition of the sovereignty of the Russian Federation over the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine or the legitimacy of its actions.

GLOSSARY

Enforced disappearance — the arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty carried out by state representatives or persons acting with its authorization or support, followed by a refusal to acknowledge such deprivation of liberty or by concealing information about the fate or whereabouts of the person, thereby placing them outside the protection of the law.

Ex officio — (Latin) "by virtue of office"; the duty of a competent state authority to initiate an investigation on its own initiative by virtue of its powers, regardless of whether a complaint or application has been submitted by the victim or their relatives.

Incommunicado detention — generally understood as a situation of detention in which a person is denied access to family members, a lawyer, or an independent doctor.¹

The phenomenon of ambiguous loss is a psychological state experienced by relatives of a missing person when there is no confirmed information about their fate, making it impossible to complete the grieving process.

Screening with isolation of individuals — a practice of temporarily detaining persons without a court decision and outside the system of official procedural registration, under the pretext of verifying their alleged involvement in "obstructing the conduct of the SMO."

Illegal detention facilities — unofficial places of deprivation of liberty that are not part of the state penitentiary or procedural registration system and are used for the unlawful detention of individuals.

Customary international law is a body of international legal norms that have formed as a result of the established practice of states and are recognized by them as legally binding, regardless of the ratification of international treaties.

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/spain0105/6.htm>

INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, enforced disappearances of civilians have been systematically carried out in the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation. Following the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, this practice has reached unprecedented scale, extending beyond the Crimean Peninsula to parts of other regions of Ukraine that came under temporary occupation. In particular, this includes the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, which, together with the Crimean Peninsula, are covered by this monitoring.

This practice is accompanied by abductions, illegal incommunicado detention in undisclosed places of detention, torture, and the forced extraction of confessions in fabricated cases. It is not about isolated or incidental incidents, but rather a sustained repressive practice that combines the complete isolation of a person from the outside world (incommunicado), the use of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as the deliberate refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or to provide information about the person's fate and whereabouts.

The combination of these elements allows qualifying such actions as enforced disappearances under international law and to consider them not merely as isolated crimes, but as a tool of systematic control over the civilian population in occupied territories. The practice of enforced disappearances is used to eliminate real or perceived opponents of the occupying authority, to intimidate local communities, to coerce cooperation, and disrupt social ties.

As of December 2025, according to the response to an information request submitted to the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, it is noted that in the temporarily occupied territories “the total number of unlawfully detained civilians and those missing under special circumstances is constantly being updated,” and that “approximately 16,000 civilians are known to have been unlawfully detained or are missing under special circumstances.”

This figure clearly demonstrates the scale of the tragedy, which, due to its systematic and organized nature, may qualify as a crime against humanity.

In Crimea, according to the ZMINA Human Rights Centre, as of the end of 2024, 27 cases of enforced disappearances had been confirmed. In the first half of 2025, an additional 18 cases were recorded, with only one person released – indicating an intensification of repression. In total, for the period from February 2022 to June 2023, the ZMINA Human Rights Centre documented at least 562 cases of abductions of active civilians in temporarily occupied territories; of these, the fate of 311 individuals remained unknown, 235 returned, and 16 were found dead.

The greatest danger lies not only in the fact of abductions, but also in the complete silencing of these crimes by the occupying authorities.

At the same time, it consistently denies any involvement, refuses to provide any information about the missing, does not conduct investigations, and does not allow independent oversight or monitoring. As this report demonstrates, all key bodies of the occupying authorities – from the FSB to the prosecutor’s office, from the police to the penitentiary service – operate as a single, coordinated mechanism for concealing information and ensuring impunity for perpetrators. Meanwhile, victims remain in complete isolation – without access to medical care, legal protection, or communication with their families.

Relatives of abducted individuals find themselves in a state of uncertainty and helplessness. They receive no information about the whereabouts or health condition of their loved ones and often lack the necessary legal knowledge or resources to take action. The absence of access to media, legal support, and opportunities to disseminate information further exacerbates the situation.

With the onset of the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022, enforced disappearances have taken on a new nature and scale. Whereas in the preceding period – particularly following the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014 – the primary targets of such actions were activists, journalists, human rights defenders, and representatives of the Crimean Tatar people, in 2022–2023 the range of victims expanded significantly. Increasingly, “ordinary” civilians have become targets of abductions: workers of critical infrastructure, pensioners, relatives of servicemembers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and individuals who maintain ties with government-controlled territory or demonstrate unwillingness to cooperate with the occupying administration.

Despite the seriousness of the problem, neither Ukrainian nor international institutions have demonstrated sufficient effectiveness in addressing it. There is a lack of systemic measures for response, proper documentation, and holding those responsible accountable.

This monitoring is a contribution to the efforts of Ukrainian civil society organizations in countering enforced disappearances and the detention of civilians in complete isolation from the outside world.

This report is an attempt at a systematic analysis of the practice of enforced disappearances of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, particularly in Crimea, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions, during the period after 2014, with a particular focus on events after 2022. The report aims to identify persistent patterns, institutional logic, and the scale of this practice, as well as to provide its legal qualification in accordance with the norms of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international criminal law.

The report was prepared for use by Ukrainian and international human rights organizations, Ukrainian state authorities, international intergovernmental organizations, treaty bodies and special mechanisms of the United Nations, as well as for the purposes of international advocacy and documentation of crimes, including in the context of potential proceedings before the International Criminal Court.

For security reasons and in line with the “do no harm” principle, certain cases have been anonymized; personal and identifying data have been altered or removed to prevent potential risks to survivors and witnesses.

Key conclusions, recommendations, and demands

Key conclusions

1. Enforced disappearances are a systematic and centrally coordinated practice of the Russian Federation. Analysis of all available sources confirms that these disappearances are not isolated excesses by individual perpetrators: identical methods of unlawful deprivation of liberty are repeated across different regions and time periods; a unified network of detention facilities exists; and all bodies of the occupation authorities act in a coordinated manner to conceal information.

2. The FSB of the Russian Federation is the key perpetrator and coordinator of enforced disappearances. All documented cases of detentions in which the perpetrators were identified are linked to units of the Federal Security Service – namely, the FSB Directorate for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, the FSB Border Service, as well as Moscow-based FSB operational groups that periodically arrive in the occupied territories to carry out planned operations.

3. The practice is evolving: from targeted abductions of activists to mass repression against anyone with a pro-Ukrainian identity. Whereas in 2014 the targets were primarily civic activists and participants of the Euromaidan, since late 2023 the victims have also included pensioners, elderly people, women (whose number has increased from 2–3 to over 60), as well as individuals whose “disloyalty” is manifested merely by not obtaining a Russian passport or by failing to attend official events organized by the occupying authorities.

4. Torture is a systematic practice: at least 90% of victims of enforced disappearances are subjected to torture. Documented methods include electric shocks, beatings, suffocation, threats of sexual violence and killing of relatives, and, in the case of women, intimidation through threats of child removal. Coercing abducted individuals, under threat, to name a certain number of acquaintances with pro-Ukrainian views is a practice that creates an ongoing cycle of repression and destroys social ties within communities.

5. Concealment of information regarding missing persons is a common practice of the occupying authorities. The FSB denies the facts of detentions. The FSIN (Federal Penitentiary Service) reports that individuals “are not listed in registration databases.” The police refuse to open cases. Military investigators completely ignore appeals. The prosecutor’s office conducts formal reviews without any real investigations. The Prosecutor General for Military Affairs redirects complaints to the very same body against which the complaint was filed. During monitoring, using the research methods applied, not a single instance of initiating an investigation ex officio was recorded.

6. The response of Ukraine’s national law enforcement agencies remains insufficient. Despite information from various sources indicating that the number of missing persons

amounts to thousands², the Prosecutor's Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol is handling only 2 criminal proceedings concerning 3 individuals under Article 146-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (enforced disappearance). Not a single indictment has been submitted to court. No official public statistics on enforced disappearances are maintained. Two registries established under separate legislative mechanisms³ are not integrated with each other. The procedure for recognising an enforced disappearance in Ukraine is imperfect, and the list of requirements is often overwhelming given the current circumstances. Payments to families are, in practice, not carried out even when the necessary documentation is available.

7. International mechanisms demonstrate limited effectiveness. The International Red Cross has found fewer individuals than Ukrainian civil society organizations have identified. Since 2014, there has been no representation of international organizations in Crimea. This situation is caused, in particular, by differences in legal approaches to the procedure for accessing the peninsula: the Russian Federation insists on entry via its own territory, whereas Ukraine, in accordance with its legislation, considers entry through territory under its control to be the only lawful route of access. Requests to the Russian authorities to visit detainees almost never receive a positive response. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Russian Federation has shown interest in the conditions of detention of political prisoners, but not in the issue of enforced disappearances as such.

² <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/spain0105/6.htm>

³ Under the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing in Special Circumstances" and the Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Persons in Respect of Whom the Fact of Deprivation of Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine Has Been Established, and Their Family Members."

Recommendations to Ukraine

- Intensify criminal proceedings in all known cases of enforced disappearances.
- Establish a unified, integrated registration system by consolidating the Missing Persons Register (Ministry of Internal Affairs), data from the National Information Bureau, and the Joint Center under the Security Service of Ukraine.
- Ensure specialized training for investigators in international humanitarian law.
- Establish systematic communication with relatives regarding the progress of investigations.
- Ensure a simplified procedure for submitting abduction reports, as well as adequate funding for compensation and rehabilitation programmes for the families of the missing.

Recommendations to the international community

- Impose sanctions on specific officials and business entities involved in enforced disappearances, torture, and coercion to collaborate in the occupied territories.
- Intensify pressure on the Russian Federation to ensure access for international monitors to the occupied territories.
- Support the establishment of rehabilitation programmes for released persons in line with the 2005 UN Resolution.
- Ensure systematic funding of monitoring projects as a critically important tool for documenting and countering enforced disappearances.

Recommendations to Civil Society

- Continue systematic documentation of cases of enforced disappearances.
- Expand networks for collecting information from areas with limited access, particularly from the Zaporizhzhia region, where the information environment remains the most restricted.
- Ensure psychological support for families of the disappeared as an integral component of human rights work.

Demands to the Russian Federation

As the occupying state, the Russian Federation bears full responsibility for the systematic practice of enforced disappearances in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The demands outlined below are based on established monitoring findings and norms of international law, in particular the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Geneva Conventions, as well as provisions of the Russian Federation's own legislation, which are systematically violated. The prohibition of enforced disappearances constitutes a norm of customary international law, binding on all states regardless of whether they have ratified the relevant conventions.

Cessation of the practice of enforced disappearances

1. **Immediately cease all operations** involving the unlawful detention, abduction, and enforced disappearance of civilians in temporarily occupied territories.
2. **Cancel any orders and directives** that allow the FSB to conduct "checks involving the isolation of individuals" without a court decision and to detain people outside the procedural registration system, including a non-public document which, according to available information, has the status of a Decree of the President of the Russian Federation marked "For Official Use."
3. **Liquidate illegal places of detention**, including the "Shambazov base" (a specially equipped torture dacha in the Simferopol district, which was at one time personally overseen by "prosecutor" Poklonskaya), as well as other unofficial facilities.
4. **To stop using critical infrastructure facilities** as detention sites, in particular the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), where at least 8 detention sites have been documented.

Release of detained persons

5. **Immediately release all civilians** held without legal grounds, without charges, and without access to a court.
6. End the use of **incommunicado detention** and immediately ensure that all detainees have access to lawyers, medical care, and contact with their families – in SIZO-2 in Simferopol, SIZO-1 in the village of Chongar, at the facilities of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and in all other places of detention.

7. **To establish and inform families of the whereabouts** of specific individuals.

Cessation of torture

8. **Immediately cease the use of torture** against detained persons.

9. **End the practice of “forced betrayal”** – the systematic coercion of detainees under torture to name a certain number of individuals with pro-Ukrainian views.

10. **Cease the use of “confessions”** obtained under torture as a propaganda tool in state media and as a basis for fabricating criminal cases.

Disclosure of information

11. **Immediately disclose full information** on the whereabouts, state of health, and legal status of every detained person. Cease invoking the law on personal data and other regulatory acts of the Russian Federation as grounds for refusing to inform families about the fate of their relatives.

12. **Cease the coordinated policy of concealment** involving all bodies of the occupying authorities.

Investigation and accountability

13. Initiate **ex officio** investigations for each documented case.

14. **To hold accountable** specific officials of the FSB and other structures (in particular, Rosatom) involved in organizing enforced disappearances.

15. Stop the fabrication of criminal cases through the scheme “abduction → torture → forced confession → official detention.”

Access of international observers

16. **Ensure unimpeded access** for the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, and other relevant mechanisms to all places of detention in temporarily occupied territories.

Compensation for damage

17. Recognize responsibility for the systematic practice of enforced disappearances of civilians as a crime against humanity and ensure compensation for both material and moral damages to the victims and their families.
18. Ensure full restitution of property unlawfully expropriated through the documented scheme of “imprisonment → deprivation of citizenship → nationalization of property.”
19. Ensure the rehabilitation of released persons in accordance with the UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation (UN General Assembly Resolution 60/147, 2005).

Cessation of persecution based on pro-Ukrainian identity

20. Cease the persecution of civilians for expressing their national identity, maintaining contacts with territory under the control of the Government of Ukraine, making financial transfers through Ukrainian payment systems, not obtaining a Russian passport, and failing to attend official events organized by the occupying authorities.
21. Put an end to the practice of intimidating women by threatening to remove their children and place them in Russian orphanages.
22. Stop using collaborators as sources of denunciations against “disloyal” individuals, which are often unfounded but become grounds for detention.

METHODOLOGY

This report is not the result of scientific research. We used the sources available to us and methods of data collection within a limited timeframe.

The **main objective** of the monitoring, which resulted in this report, is to strengthen the response to the practice of enforced disappearances in temporarily occupied Crimea and the occupied parts of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation.

As the **subject of the monitoring**, we identified five research problems:

1. The mechanisms of enforced disappearances.
2. The motives and objectives of the occupying authorities.
3. The fate of individuals subjected to enforced disappearances.
4. The impact on relatives (their behavior, reactions, and condition) and their ability to respond (search efforts, where to apply, where to obtain assistance, etc.).
5. The response of Ukraine's national law enforcement authorities.

For each of the research problems, we developed indicator questions based on international standards for preventing and addressing enforced disappearances. These questions served as the basis for collecting data from various sources and through different methods.

This report is a synthesis of findings obtained through various data collection methods and the analysis of data from individual sources. In particular, it ensures the triangulation of information - cross-verification of conclusions through the comparison of data from different independent sources.

SOURCES AND METHODS

Documented individual cases

Expanded analysis of 10 interview-based case studies with survivors of enforced disappearances and their relatives.

Method: semi-structured interview.

Interviews with representatives of Ukrainian human rights organizations

Method: four expert interviews.

Analysis of the response and official replies of the occupying authorities to appeals from relatives

Method: content analysis of responses from the occupying authorities in Crimea (FSB, police, prosecutor's office, FSIN, Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation) to appeals submitted by relatives of missing persons.

Video Materials Analysis

Method: study of two cases of enforced disappearances captured on surveillance cameras: Ervin Ibragimov (2016) and Iryna Danylovykh (2022).

OSINT research

Method: analysis of open sources of information regarding 14 cases of possible enforced disappearances in Crimea and Kherson region.

Analysis of responses of Ukrainian national authorities to information requests

Method: analysis of the responses of the Prosecutor's Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, and the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to official requests.

Content analysis of previous relevant studies conducted by other organizations

Analysis of four key studies:

- Enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions of active citizens during the full-scale Russian armed aggression (February 2022 – June 2023), Human Rights Centre ZMINA;
- How the practice of arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances has changed under occupation (2023–2024), Human Rights Centre ZMINA;
- "Specific features of enforced disappearances in Crimea during the intensification of resistance in 2023–2024" (UKR) – a study by the human rights initiative Irade, the human rights organisation Crimean Process, and the Public Union "Human Rights House Crimea";
- Enforced disappearances: national practice vs. international standards, Coalition "Ukraine. 5AM"

Sample and study region

Monitoring is based on the definition of enforced disappearance in accordance with Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 2006): the arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which places such a person outside the protection of the law.

During the monitoring, a conditional classification of territories is applied according to the following categories: “temporarily occupied,” “territories that are/were encircled (blockaded),” and “territories where active hostilities are/were ongoing.” Additionally, the classification of territories under martial law is taken into account, including “frontline,” “de-occupied,” “temporarily occupied,” and “rear” areas.

To conduct the monitoring, the following regions were selected: temporarily occupied Crimea, as well as parts of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions that have been under occupation since the beginning of the Russian Federation’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine.

The sample focuses on territories where numerous cases have already been documented and where a further increase in enforced disappearances and related human rights violations is anticipated.

Target groups for data collection:

- Families of the missing;
- witnesses and victims;
- human rights initiatives and local networks (such as “Crimean Process,” “Crimean Human Rights Group,” “ZMINA Human Rights Centre,” “IRADE,” “Association of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners,” etc.) that have access to local communities and are able to verify information.

Methodological approach:

- Application of data verification practices using multiple sources: interviews with relatives and witnesses, materials from human rights organizations, open sources, etc.
- Preparation of an analytical product for national and international advocacy platforms (the United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe, national human rights institutions, and other relevant monitoring bodies).

Limitations:

During the monitoring process, objective limitations were taken into account, including the lack of access to temporarily occupied territories, security risks for witnesses and relatives, as well as the deliberate policy of concealing information by the occupying state. To minimize these risks, a multi-layered verification approach was applied, including cross-checking different sources and the use of indirect evidence.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

This section provides an analysis of legal norms related to enforced disappearances in light of international law and national legislation. The analysis is based on key international instruments and identifies which specific provisions are being violated, particularly in the context of the responsibility of the Russian Federation as a state exercising effective control over the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. It also includes a comparison of international standards with the existing provisions of Russian and Ukrainian legislation in the field of preventing enforced disappearances.

International law

The foundational document is the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted in 2006. This document defines the term “enforced disappearance” as “the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, thereby placing such a person outside the protection of the law.”

Thus, enforced disappearance is defined as the combination of the following elements:

- deprivation of liberty in any form
- involvement of the state in these actions
- concealment or refusal to acknowledge the fact of deprivation of liberty

It also defines who is considered a victim of enforced disappearance: “a victim is deemed to be any disappeared person and any individual who has suffered direct harm as a result of an enforced disappearance” (Article 24).

It is noteworthy that the document does not allow for any exceptional circumstances for enforced disappearances, including a state of war (Art. 1). It is also notable that state authorities are required to “promptly conduct a thorough and impartial investigation” into identified cases of enforced disappearances even in the absence of a complaint (Art. 12).

It is important to note that Article 5 of this Convention provides that, under certain circumstances defined by international law, enforced disappearances constitute a crime against humanity.

Indeed, in paragraph (i) of Article 7 of the Rome Statute, “enforced disappearances” are explicitly listed as one of the acts that may be qualified as a crime against humanity. The same article further specifies that, in this context, enforced disappearances must:

- a) be committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population;
- b) such an attack is carried out with knowledge.

The term “enforced disappearance” appears in the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and was later defined in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance as follows: “the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by the State or by a political organization, or with their authorization, support or acquiescence, followed by a refusal to acknowledge such deprivation of liberty or to disclose the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time.”

Neither the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court nor the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance has been ratified by the Russian Federation. At the same time, the country is a party to the previously adopted Geneva Conventions, including the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in time of war. This document does not contain the specific term “enforced disappearances” in the formulation used in later instruments such as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. However, it categorically prohibits actions that, in their nature, constitute enforced disappearances and establishes general principles for the protection of the civilian population.

Key provisions related to this issue include:

- Prohibition of acts of violence and intimidation. Persons under protection (civilians under the authority of a party to the conflict) “shall at all times be protected against all acts of violence or intimidation” (Art. 27). Enforced disappearances constitute a clear violation of this principle.
- The prohibition of collective punishments and reprisals. The Convention prohibits collective punishments, as well as “intimidation or terrorism” (Article 33). Enforced disappearances may be used as a means of intimidation or reprisals.
- Protection against killings, torture, and inhuman treatment. The Convention prohibits “the taking of any measures of such a character as to cause the physical suffering or extermination of protected persons in their hands” (Art. 32). The abduction of civilians, followed by their detention, is generally associated with a risk of torture, inhuman treatment, and threats to life.
- Prohibition of hostage-taking. The Convention stipulates that “the taking of hostages is prohibited” (Art. 34). Enforced disappearances and prolonged detention may, under certain conditions, be regarded as hostage-taking, where a party has not yet put forward demands for their release.

It should also be emphasized that the Fourth Geneva Convention clearly defines the permissible restrictions on the freedom of civilians in occupied territory. In cases where the occupying authority “considers the control measures provided for in this Convention to be inadequate, it may not resort to any measures of control more severe than assigned

residence or internment” (Art. 41).

In certain cases, “if, in occupied territory, an individual protected by the Convention is detained as a spy or saboteur, or as a person under definite suspicion of activity hostile to the security of the occupying power, such person may, where absolute military security so requires, be deprived of rights of communication.” At the same time, such a person may not be deprived of the right to humane treatment or of the right to a fair and regular trial (Article 5).

Thus, although the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 does not use the exact term “enforced disappearance,” it prohibits such acts by classifying them as grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

Russian legislation

Russian legislation does not contain a distinct criminal offense of “enforced disappearance” in the sense defined under international law (i.e., arrest, detention, or abduction by state agents followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty).

Nevertheless, acts that fall under the definition of “enforced disappearance” may be qualified under the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (CC RF) as:

1) Article 126 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation “Kidnapping.” This article establishes criminal liability for moving a person against their will from one place to another. The commentary to the article explains that the term “kidnapping” refers to the unlawful seizure of a living person followed by their forced detention. The object of the criminal offense is the personal liberty of the individual, meaning that within the Russian Federation everyone is guaranteed freedom of movement and the right to choose their place of stay and residence (Article 27 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation).

Kidnapping may be carried out secretly or openly, with the use of violence or threats of violence, through deception, abuse of trust, or by exploiting a person’s condition in which they are unable to fully understand the nature of the perpetrator’s actions. This includes the abduction of a sleeping person, a person in a state of severe intoxication, a person with mental illness, a child, a foreigner who cannot adequately assess the situation due to lack of language knowledge, etc. Often, the victim becomes aware of the fact of the kidnapping only later.

The subjective element of the crime is characterized by direct intent. The purpose and motives of the kidnapping are not relevant for its legal qualification.

2) Article 127 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation “Unlawful deprivation of liberty.” If, after an abduction, a person is held in custody, this is additionally classified as unlawful deprivation of liberty. The direct object of the crime is a person’s individual physical freedom. The objective aspect consists of actions in the form of unlawfully preventing a person from moving from one place to another, choosing their location and place of stay at their own discretion, etc. At the same time, the victim is unlawfully, forcibly, and against their

will kept in a place where they had previously been voluntarily. This is a formal offense and is considered completed when a person is actually deprived of the ability to move and relocate freely at their own discretion. The duration of the unlawful deprivation of liberty does not affect its qualification. Depriving a person of liberty on lawful grounds - such as during the suppression of a crime, delivery to law enforcement authorities, in a state of necessity, or in necessary self-defense - does not constitute the offense provided for by Article 127 of the Criminal Code. The subjective aspect of this crime is characterized only by direct intent: the perpetrator is aware that they are unlawfully depriving the victim of liberty and intends to do so. The motives of the perpetrator are irrelevant.

3) Article 286 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation “Abuse of official powers.” If representatives of the state (law enforcement officers, security forces, etc.) are involved in an enforced disappearance, their actions may additionally be qualified under this article. The social danger of the crime is mainly determined by two elements: (1) the deliberate and evident exceeding by an official of the limits of their official authority; (2) a substantial violation, as a result of such actions, of legally protected interests. The object of the crime is the rights and lawful interests of citizens. The objective aspect is expressed in the commission by an official of actions that clearly go beyond their authority and have resulted in a substantial violation of the rights and lawful interests of citizens. Actions that clearly exceed the powers of an official may be expressed in the commission of:

- a) actions that fall within the competence of another official;
- b) actions carried out individually that may only be performed collectively;
- c) actions performed in the absence of special authorization or the conditions required in a specific situation;
- d) actions that no official is authorized to perform.

It is necessary that each of the listed actions of an official be explicit, that is, clearly exceeding the rights and powers granted to them by the relevant нормативні acts. The offence is considered completed at the moment when consequences occur in the form of a substantial violation of the rights and legitimate interests of citizens. The subjective element is characterized by either direct or indirect intent. Motives and purposes are not mandatory elements of the offence and do not affect the legal qualification of the act. The subject of the offence is always an official.

Russia, as previously noted, has not ratified the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The official position of Russia, as stated during UN periodic reviews, is that:

- Ratification of the Convention at this stage is considered a “premature step.”
- Existing provisions of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (abduction, unlawful deprivation of liberty, abuse of official authority), combined with other legal mechanisms, make it possible to effectively investigate and prosecute acts that fall under the definition of enforced disappearances.

A separate place in the system of Russian law is occupied by a document on measures for the isolation of individuals for the purpose of verifying the fact of providing resistance to the conduct of the “special military operation” (SMO). This document is non-public. According to unconfirmed information, the document has the status of a Decree of the President of the Russian Federation marked “For Official Use.”

Based on certain reports and emerging practice, this decree appears to grant representatives of the FSB the authority to carry out “checks with isolation of individuals” suspected of “obstructing the conduct of the special military operation (SMO).” To deprive individuals of their liberty, no court decision is required; instead, FSB officials are empowered to detain individuals solely on the basis of a decision by the local head of the FSB. In addition, institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service are required to assist in ensuring the secure isolation of persons detained by the FSB.

At the same time, FSIN officers ensure their deprivation of liberty without entering any information into the registry of suspects, accused, and convicted persons, since these individuals do not hold any of these statuses. In cases where charges are later lawfully brought, the period of detention is calculated from the date of the lawful arrest decision, rather than from the moment of the actual deprivation of liberty.

Thus, throughout the entire period of detention prior to the formal filing of criminal charges, the Russian system considers such individuals as being “under verification.” It is impossible to challenge either the fact of this “verification” or the deprivation of personal liberty during this time, as formally, no such “verification” exists in Russian legislation.

Ukrainian legislation

In Ukrainian legislation, enforced disappearance is recognized as a separate criminal offense. This followed the adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code of Ukraine that brought it into alignment with international law.⁴ In particular, Article 146-1 was introduced, which directly criminalizes enforced disappearance. According to this article, enforced disappearance is defined as the arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty of a person, carried out by a state representative, followed by a refusal to acknowledge such deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the person.

The key elements of the crime are: actions by state representatives involving deprivation of liberty, combined with a refusal to acknowledge this fact or the concealment of information about the person’s fate or whereabouts. This provision allows for holding accountable both

⁴However, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, in its report following a visit to Ukraine in 2018, whilst welcoming the introduction into legislation of a self-standing definition of the crime of enforced disappearance, drew attention to several gaps in the definition: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/42/40/Add.2>

the direct perpetrators and the superiors who ordered the act or failed to take measures to prevent the crime despite being aware of it.

Ukraine ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in 2015. This marked an important step toward the implementation of international standards in national legislation. Prior to ratification and the introduction of Article 146-1, acts falling under the definition of “enforced disappearance” were classified under other provisions, such as “abduction” (Article 146 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine) or “abuse of power or official authority” (Article 365 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine). However, these provisions did not fully capture all elements of enforced disappearance, particularly with regard to state responsibility and the concealment of information.

Part 1:

The Mechanics of Enforced Disappearances

In this section, we present the results of documenting the chain of events from detention to disappearance. This makes it possible to assess the systematic and organized nature of these operations and to confirm their institutional character.

The practice of enforced disappearances of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine is characterized by a clear internal logic and a recurring pattern of actions, which makes it possible to speak of an established operational model. Analysis of documented cases, testimonies of released individuals, video surveillance materials, and expert interviews allows for the identification of a series of sequential stages that, taken together, form the mechanics of enforced disappearance.

1.1. Stages

1.1.1. Identification and selection of victims

The first stage in the mechanism of enforced disappearance is the identification of an individual whom the occupying authorities perceive as a potential threat or an undesirable element. The criteria for such selection are not limited to active participation in resistance. In many cases, the mere existence of social ties with government-controlled Ukrainian territory, the use of Ukrainian digital services, refusal to cooperate with the occupation administration, or even a passive stance perceived as disloyalty may be sufficient grounds.

It is important to emphasize that the selection of victims is often carried out on the basis of previously gathered information. Data from mobile phones, social media, local informants, as well as the results of so-called filtration measures are used. This points to the planned, rather than random, nature of enforced disappearances.

1.1.2. Abduction or detention

The second stage is the direct abduction or detention of a person. Territorially, it can take place in various locations: at the place of residence, at work, at checkpoints, or in public spaces. In the majority of documented cases, detention is carried out without the presentation of any procedural documents and without explanation of the grounds.

Individuals carrying out abductions typically operate in groups, use vehicles without identifying markings or with altered license plates, and employ elements of disguise. Surveillance footage, including in the cases of Iryna Danylovysh and Ervin Ibragimov, demonstrates a high level of coordination, speed of action, and minimization of time spent at the scene. Such features rule out randomness and indicate the professional nature of these operations.

1.1.3. Complete isolation (incommunicado detention)

Following the abduction, the individual is immediately placed in a state of complete isolation from the outside world. Relatives receive no official information about the detainee's whereabouts, and inquiries to the occupying authorities either remain unanswered or are met with denial of the very fact of detention. It is precisely this stage that is critical for qualifying such acts as enforced disappearance under international law.

During periods of incommunicado detention, individuals are held in unofficial places of detention, such as basements of administrative buildings, premises of security forces, industrial facilities, or private houses. The lack of access to a lawyer, medical care, and family members creates conditions of complete impunity for the perpetrators.

1.1.4. Torture and Coercion

Torture is a systemic element of the mechanism of enforced disappearances and is primarily used at the early stages of detention. Documented testimonies indicate the use of beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, prolonged stress positions, as well as psychological violence, including threats against family members.

The purpose of torture is not only to obtain information, but also to break a person's will and create a state of total dependence and subjugation. Torture often ceases or decreases only after the individual formally agrees to cooperate or to sign documents, the contents of which are not explained to them.

1.1.5. Concealment and "legalization" of detention

The next stage involves concealing information about the person's fate, followed by their so-called "legalization." In many cases, weeks or even months after the abduction, criminal proceedings are initiated retroactively, and the unlawful deprivation of liberty is presented as a lawful detention. The preceding period of torture and incommunicado detention is neither acknowledged nor investigated.

This approach allows the occupying authorities to create the appearance of compliance with formal procedures, while at the same time preventing effective legal protection for victims and their families.

1.1.6. Prolonged detention or transfer (convoy)

The final stage of the mechanism is either the prolonged detention of a person in places of imprisonment on temporarily occupied territories, or their transfer to Crimea or to the territory of the Russian Federation. Frequent movements between different detention facilities are intended to disorient and complicate the search process. Families often learn about such transfers by chance or with significant delay.

Taken together, all these stages form a closed cycle of enforced disappearance that can last for months or even years. It is precisely this duration and repetition that make enforced disappearances one of the most severe and destructive crimes against the civilian population.

1.2. Typical scenarios of detention

A cross-analysis of all sources revealed several consistently recurring scenarios, indicating not random actions but well-established standard operating procedures.

1.2.1. Detention during a search of a residence is the most common scenario. Armed individuals in masks and camouflage (typically 6 to 20 people) arrive, usually early in the morning – most often between 5:00 and 7:30 a.m. They conduct a search, seizing phones, computer equipment, and documents, after which the victim is taken away “for a conversation” without any explanation of their legal status, the grounds for detention, or the destination. A search record is typically not drawn up. The Irade study describes the cases of Ashurov, Osmanov, Ismailov, Bariev, and Shemshedinov in this way.

In the analysis of interview-based cases, a similar but somewhat different scenario was documented in the case of Buyukhchan Khatidzhe. After her detention at another location, officers of the FSB came to the family with a search. The family did not know the woman’s whereabouts for 21 days.

1.2.2. Abduction on the street or from a vehicle. The victim is stopped on the road, often with the involvement of traffic police officers (DPS), who act as “decoys.” After the stop, a minibus arrives carrying masked individuals who transfer the victim into it. Methods used include placing a bag over the head, binding with tape, and the use of physical violence during transportation. This scenario is also confirmed by video evidence: in the case of Ervin Ibragimov (2016, captured on surveillance cameras), a minibus with its headlights on had been positioned in advance on the road, and a person holding an object resembling a traffic police baton stopped his car. When Ibragimov attempted to flee, two abductors chased and seized him – the entire operation, from the moment of resistance to departure, lasted only 11 seconds. His fate remains unknown to this day.

1.2.3. Detention at checkpoints – verification of documents and mobile phones, followed by transfer to an unknown destination. For example, on 23 July 2022, contact was lost with a resident of Kherson region, Appaz Kurtamet, after his arrival at a checkpoint at the entry to occupied Crimea. At this checkpoint, he was detained and transferred to SIZO-2 in Simferopol, where he was held in isolation for nearly three months before charges were brought against him.

1.2.4. Detentions in public places – attacks in the middle of the street (Arsen Dzhepparov – thrown to the ground, a weapon held to his head), near the home (Muslimova), near a police station (Mambet Asan-Usta). Only in one of the documented cases (Murtazaiev, Sudak) was compliance with legal grounds and proper conduct by FSB representatives recorded – this appears to be an exception.

1.3. Implementing actors: the leading role of the FSB

All sources consistently confirm that the key executor of detention operations is the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. An analysis of official responses from the occupying authorities indicates that “all known cases were carried out by representatives of the FSB of the Russian Federation – the vast majority by officers of the FSB Directorate for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, with some cases involving representatives of the FSB Border Directorate and unidentified FSB units of Russia.”

During one of the expert interviews, we heard about an important detail: in Sevastopol, there is a separate FSB unit where operational groups from Moscow periodically arrive. Following their visits, planned operations take place. In 2025, according to one testimony, at least three women disappeared within a week—and shortly before that, FSB officers from Moscow had arrived in Sevastopol.

Typical characteristics of the perpetrators include: black or camouflage uniforms without insignia, balaclavas; armed with assault rifles; operating in groups of 3 to 20 individuals; moving in civilian minibuses (“Gazelle”) without license plates; and often a categorical refusal to identify themselves or state the reasons for detention.

In most cases where there were witnesses (relatives), the FSB abductors state that the person is being detained on suspicion of treason or other crimes, after which the person disappears.

1.4. Places of detention

The research made it possible to compile a map of key detention sites, which demonstrates the existence of an extensive infrastructure of unlawful deprivation of liberty.

SIZO-2 in Simferopol is a central element of this infrastructure. According to expert interviews, this detention facility was “deliberately opened for those abducted from the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions” in the summer of 2022, following “instructions from Moscow, precisely coordinated.” It is fully controlled by the FSB: “only the FSB has access; no lawyers at the outset.” Individuals were held “without any procedural status until November–December 2022,” and some remain in ***incommunicado detention*** to this day – including the mayor of Hola Prystan. The Irade study confirms that Shemshedinov was held on the 3rd floor, cell 44, under ***incommunicado detention*** conditions; Liudmyla Kolesnykova was held for three months without communication and without basic hygienic conditions, in cells with painted-over windows.

Other documented locations include: the FSB Directorate in Simferopol (with basement facilities); Pre-Trial Detention Center No. 1 in Kherson region, located in Chongar, which at different times was also used as a transit hub (from Girkin’s checkpoint in 2014 to its current functioning as an official SIZO); temporary detention facilities (ITT) in Sevastopol and

Yevpatoria; the basement of Vocational School No. 17 in the city of Henichesk; as well as Pre-Trial Detention Center No. 8 in Simferopol.

Of particular significance is the “Shambazov base” – a dacha belonging to the Shambazov brothers (one working for the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, the other for the FSB) in the Simferopol district, which, according to human rights defenders, was “equipped for torture: doors for tying people up, a basement.” The use of this facility has been documented in the cases of Oleksandr Kostenko (2015) and Yevhen Panov (2017). Kostenko’s case was personally overseen by the then “prosecutor” Natalia Poklonskaya, who “knew about and covered up” the detention at the base – indicating the involvement of the occupation authorities at the highest level.

Detention sites have been documented on the territory of Zaporizhzhia region at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant: according to human rights defenders, there are “at least 8 places of detention” at the facility, where representatives of the International Atomic Energy Agency work simultaneously on the 5th floor, while detention sites operate in the basement of the same building.

1.5. Coordinated policy of information concealment

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence of the systematic nature of enforced disappearances is the coordination with which all bodies of the occupying authorities conceal information from the relatives of the disappeared. The analysis revealed a two-tier system of concealment.

1.5.1. First level – concealment through the verification mechanism under Article 126 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (“Kidnapping”). The police provide responses that violate the requirements of Article 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Russian Federation, such as: “the complaint has been added to the registry file, we recommend contacting the FSB”; “initiation of proceedings has been refused due to the absence of a crime event”; “the person’s location has been established” – without specifying the actual location. Following appeals, the materials are transferred to the military investigative departments of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, which completely ignore them. Throughout the entire period covered by the project, relatives of victims of enforced disappearances did not receive a single response from military investigators.

1.5.2. Second level – concealment through the Federal Security Service of Russia.

The FSB uses two methods: citing the personal data law (claiming that information cannot be provided without the individual's consent) and asserting that “no measures provided for by the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Russian Federation have been taken against the individual.” At the same time, the FSB consistently ignores questions about detention on “other” grounds – those not provided for by law. The analysis results indicate that relatives have repeatedly inquired about detention both on the basis of the Code of Criminal Procedure and on the basis of other procedures not provided for by legislation. The FSB invariably responds only to the first part.

A telling example of repeated duplication of responses is one case in which the FSB provided 10 identical responses over the course of 8 months. Further confirmation is the provision of identical form responses to different individuals, in which only the signature of the official who provided the response differs. For example, in the case of A.Ch. – the responses were signed by the Deputy Head of the FSB Directorate R. Nechaev, while in the case of Sh.K. – they were signed by the First Deputy Head of the FSB Directorate K.A. Doroshenko.

Part 2:

Motives and goals of the occupation authorities.

This section explores the strategic dimension of enforced disappearances, examining how they are integrated into the broader military and political objectives of the occupying authorities.

2.1. Evolution of victim selection criteria

The analysis has demonstrated a significant transformation in the criteria used for selecting individuals for detention over the ten years of occupation.

2014–2021 – targets included participants of the **Euromaidan**, the **Automaidan**, civic activists, leaders of small communities (religious and cultural), journalists, and former employees of local self-government bodies, the police, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine. Crimean Tatars were persecuted primarily for alleged affiliation with **Hizb ut-Tahrir** or the **Noman Çelebicihan Battalion**.

2022 – **filtration was indiscriminate in nature**: participants of the ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation), police officers, members of the territorial defence, local leaders, and activists were detained. According to testimonies from the NGO Crimean Process, “the occupiers had lists” of individuals to be detained.

Late 2023 marked a turning point. One of the organizations whose representatives participated in an expert interview noted a qualitative shift: “*the proactive minority has been suppressed or gone underground—there is almost none left.*” After that, the system “switched” to new target groups—older and elderly people, as well as individuals whose children left after the occupation and who remain in contact with them, thereby “potentially transmitting information.” It should also be noted that during this period, many people who had previously been associated with leaders of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people were subjected to short-term abductions for polygraph testing and interrogations.

2024–2025 – **a critical lowering of the “disloyalty” threshold.** Where previously it was necessary to make openly pro-Ukrainian statements, it is now enough to demonstrate passive “non-compliance”: not obtaining a Russian passport, not attending local gatherings, or not participating in the restoration of Soviet monuments. A new wave of detentions is linked to financial transfers via Privat24, which are being interpreted as “financing a terrorist organization” – even when these are simply transfers from parents to their children.

“The longer the occupation continues, the more people will be crushed by it. The system will reach everyone who isn’t waving a Russian flag and shouting that Putin is great,” – from one of the expert interviews.

2.2. Gender dimension

One of the alarming trends is the sharp increase in the number of women among the victims. According to human rights defenders, prior to 2022 there were only 2–3 women on the lists of political prisoners in Crimea, whereas now there are over 60. Among them are participants of the Euromaidan, members of resistance movements (such as the “Yellow Ribbon”), women with ties to government-controlled territory, and relatives of Ukrainian Armed Forces personnel and intelligence officers.

Human rights defenders explain this increase by several factors: the intensification of the FSB’s activities and a sweeping crackdown on resistance; since 2022, there have been significantly more cases of violent resistance (sabotage, military operations), prompting the FSB to search for agents; as well as a propaganda objective: “even women cannot be trusted,” “Banderites are everywhere, even among women and children”; and an attempt to intimidate the disloyal population – “we will harshly punish even mothers of young children and elderly sick women, so don’t even think about resistance.”

Methods of coercion also have a gender-specific dimension. While men are more often subjected to physical torture (beatings, electric shocks applied to the genitals), psychological methods predominate in the case of women. The “most terrifying method” is intimidation through threats of child removal: social services would arrive to take children away for transfer to Russian orphanages. Since 2022, this practice has become “fairly common in cases involving women.”

2.3. Strategic goals

The synthesis of all sources makes it possible to identify several strategic goals that enforced disappearances serve.

Suppression of resistance and elimination of leaders. Enforced disappearances are systematically used to remove individuals capable of organizing and coordinating resistance – ranging from activists to local self-government officials. For example, the disappearance of the mayor of Hola Prystan, who is being held *incommunicado* in SIZO-2 due to his refusal to cooperate with the occupying authorities.

Creating an atmosphere of pervasive fear. As experts note, “the occupiers achieve their goal of intimidation” (from expert interviews). The public and demonstrative nature of operations—detentions carried out in broad daylight, in the presence of neighbors and relatives—is intended to maximize the psychological impact on the community. Analysis of video materials confirms this: in the case of Iryna Danylovyh, the perpetrators acted openly near a gas station, not concealing themselves from cameras and even showing identification to a random witness.

Coercion to leave. This particularly affects Crimean Tatars: “enforced disappearances are a strong argument to leave, while high-profile detentions are the final argument” (from expert interviews). This aligns with a broader strategy of altering the demographic composition of the population.

Fabrication of criminal cases. The operational objective of enforced disappearances is to “have all confessions secured at the stage of opening a case” (from expert interviews). The victim is held incommunicado, coerced into signing a confession, filmed in a propaganda video, and only then officially “detained.”

Economic motive. One expert interview describes the mechanism as follows: “imprisonment → loss of citizenship → nationalization of property.” Political prisoners are stripped of Russian citizenship during their imprisonment, after which their property may be expropriated in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation.

The role of collaborators. Experts describe a mechanism whereby local collaborators become instruments of the system: by occupying positions in local self-government bodies or municipal enterprises, they “must constantly prove that their loyalty continues and remains relevant” – and to do so, they “must continuously file reports (denunciations),” pointing out “disloyal” individuals. These reports often do not reflect reality, yet they become grounds for detention.

Part 3:

The fate of people who have been subjected to enforced disappearances

3.1. Incommunicado detention

The defining feature of the fate of disappeared persons is their detention in incommunicado conditions – complete isolation from the outside world. OSINT investigations have confirmed that the systematic absence of these individuals from all official databases (SIZO-2 in Simferopol, the Rosfinmonitoring registry, and the websites of occupation courts) is not a coincidence, but rather evidence of an incommunicado regime. The Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia (*FSIN in Russian*) typically reports that “the individual is not listed in the records,” even though in some cases their actual detention in SIZO-2 is confirmed through unofficial channels.

In one case, the family remained in complete uncertainty for 21 days, after which they received only brief contact and the single word “Sevastopol.” In another case, there were over 12 months without any confirmation of the place of detention (as of February 2026). In yet another case, a person disappeared in May 2025 – as of February 2026, despite dozens of inquiries, the family has no information about his whereabouts.

3.2. Torture and ill-treatment

Torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are an inherent and systemic element of the practice of enforced disappearances of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The collected materials indicate that torture is not a byproduct of unlawful detention, but is deliberately used as a tool to achieve specific operational and political objectives.

According to human rights defenders, at least 90% of detainees are subjected to torture. Expert interviews confirm that “in cases against Ukrainians – it happens universally, without exception.”

In the overwhelming majority of documented cases, torture was applied already at the early stages following abduction, often within the first hours or days of a person’s ***incommunicado detention***. Therefore, the use of violence constitutes a premeditated element of the system, rather than a reaction to the behavior of detainees. Torture is employed to rapidly break a person psychologically and physically, to establish a state of total control, and to eliminate any form of resistance.

Methods of torture are standardized and repeated regardless of the identity of the detainee or the region, which further indicates the institutional nature of this practice.

Analysis of testimonies from released individuals and monitoring materials makes it possible to identify several main groups of torture methods. Physical forms include beatings; strikes with rifle butts and kicks; strangulation; electric shocks (very frequently), including to the genitals (documented in men); prolonged restraint in painful positions; twisting of limbs; tying; placing a bag over the head; starvation; the use of guard dogs; and denial of access to toilets and medical care. Psychological forms include threats of execution or rape; mock executions; prolonged sleep deprivation; humiliation; the physical torture of people in adjacent rooms (for example, the case of the Akhtemov brothers); as well as threats against family members.

A distinct category comprises methods aimed at the complete depersonalization of the victim. These include detention with bags or blindfolds over the head, prohibition of communication, isolation in dark premises, and the relocation of detainees without explanation. Such methods are intended to disorient individuals and destroy their sense of time and space.

It is also important to distinguish, as a separate category, the general conditions of detention of victims of enforced disappearances, which constitute forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. These include the absence of a change of clothing throughout the entire period of ***incommunicado detention***; lack of hygiene products; restricted access to washing (five minutes once a week); a strict daily regime prohibiting sitting or lying down for up to 16 hours a day; requirements to perform the Russian state anthem daily; forced listening to Russian propaganda via radio broadcasts; movement through corridors only in the so-called “**swallow**” position (head lowered below the waist, hands raised high behind the back); lack of medical care; poor heating and ventilation in cells; and limited, low-quality food.

Brutal torture is also confirmed by specific verified cases. **Kyrylo Barannyk** was subjected to electric shocks for an hour, beatings, and threats to kill his mother; he had a special mask placed on his head, preventing him from seeing those involved. He was subjected to repeated torture (it is difficult even to determine the perpetrators’ motive), including the use of simulated drowning. **Eldar Mensitov** endured 10–12 hours of interrogations and beatings in an unknown basement facility. **Rinat Paralamov** directly identified the FSB as the perpetrators; electric shocks, beatings, and coercion to sign documents were documented. **Mambet Asan-Usta** had his mouth and eyes covered, his hands tied, a bag placed over his head and taped; during transportation, he was periodically beaten.

Torture is used not only to obtain information, but also as a tool of coercion to force cooperation. In a number of cases, individuals are offered an end to the violence in exchange for signing documents, participating in the activities of the occupying authorities, or publicly demonstrating loyalty.

The use of torture also has a demonstrative effect. Even if information about specific methods of violence does not become public, the very fact of individuals disappearing and later returning in a severe physical or psychological condition serves as a means of intimidation for a broader segment of the population.

The consequences of torture are long-lasting and extend beyond the period of detention. Released individuals report chronic pain syndromes, sleep disturbances, anxiety disorders, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as difficulties in returning to normal social life. In many cases, the lack of access to medical care during detention leads to irreversible health consequences. The psychological impact of torture also affects the families of disappeared persons, who live in a state of constant uncertainty and fear.

From the perspective of international law, the use of torture in conjunction with enforced disappearances constitutes a grave violation of the absolute prohibition of torture, as enshrined in international treaties. In the context of an international armed conflict, such acts may be qualified as war crimes, and—if their systematic and widespread nature is established—as crimes against humanity.

The body of evidence collected through monitoring indicates that torture is not applied in isolation, but as part of a coordinated policy. This is of key importance for further international legal qualification and for establishing responsibility not only of the direct perpetrators, but also of those at higher levels of command.

3.3. Coercion to turn in/give up people

A particularly alarming practice identified by human rights defenders is the systematic coercion of each detainee to name at least five individuals with a pro-Ukrainian stance: “until they believe you don’t know anyone, until you do this — they won’t release you.” People name acquaintances in an attempt to save themselves from torture, while “not necessarily naming those with a strongly pro-Ukrainian position.” The individuals named are then visited, and the cycle continues.

According to expert interviews, this practice is “very, very widespread” and fuels stigmatization within the community: those who did not name anyone condemn those who did. This form of “coerced betrayal” erodes the social fabric of occupied communities from within—and is likely one of the objectives of the occupying authorities.

3.4. The “legalization” scheme of detention

The “Irade” study identified a characteristic pattern in which a person is first abducted and held without any procedural status, and only after the required “confessions” are obtained are they officially “detained” and charged. **Kyrylo Barannyk**: abducted on May 30, 2023, subjected to electric torture; the official detention record was issued only the following day. **Lera Dzhemileva**: disappeared in May 2024 after a house search, while notification of her official detention appeared only on March 20, 2025. **Liudmyla Kolesnykova**: held for three months without contact with the outside world; the court formally ordered her arrest only on October 3, 2024.

Part 4:

Impact on families and local communities

Enforced disappearances have a multidimensional impact that extends far beyond the direct violation of an individual's rights. They generate a prolonged ripple of harm affecting the families of the disappeared, their close social circles, and local communities as a whole. This impact is systemic and long-term, with consequences that persist even after release.

4.1. The phenomenon of "ambiguous loss"

Relatives of missing persons find themselves in a state that specialists refer to as "**ambiguous loss**" – a painful oscillation between hope and despair in the absence of reliable information. In the case of **Ervin Ibragimov**, who disappeared in 2016, his family has remained in this state for nearly ten years. In the **Panchuk** case, information arrived in fragments – through publicly released videos by the Russian "RIA Novosti" showing signs of beatings, and through testimonies of other detainees. However, such information later ceased altogether, leaving only a notice from the Russian police listing him as a missing person. In the case of **V.C.**, the family received a single testimony from an individual who claimed to have seen the abducted person in **SIZO-2 Simferopol** – the only piece of information during nine months of uncertainty, alongside official responses from Russian security services denying any involvement in his disappearance.

This uncertainty undermines families' ability to plan for the future, maintain everyday life, and go through a normal grieving process. A family can neither mourn nor reunite with their loved one – and this state can last for years.

Relatives of missing persons are forced to independently search for any information about the fate of their loved ones, turning to human rights organizations, Ukrainian state authorities, and international institutions. This process is often accompanied by re-traumatization, as each new contact or rejection revives the experienced sense of loss and helplessness.

4.2. Secondary victimization, threats against families, and the expansion of the circle of victims

Relatives of the disappeared are subjected to additional pressure by the occupying authorities, turning their search efforts into a source of further suffering. Standardized responses of "unknown" from various institutions create a sense of hopelessness. In **Panchuk's** case, the arrest of a relative was documented – direct pressure on the family used as a tool of intimidation. A common practice, as in the case of **Buyukhchan Hatidzhe**, includes restricting contact and visits, as well as requiring paid channels for correspondence and the transfer of parcels.

As one participant in an expert interview on the Kherson region notes, “relatives search on their own and then disappear” – a situation in which searching for a missing person creates risks for those conducting the search. In the Zaporizhzhia region, the problem is exacerbated by a general atmosphere of fear: “people are very frightened, worried about contact with territory under control, many testimonies are given without consent for sharing with law enforcement agencies” (from an expert interview). Documented cases indicate that detainees were shown information about the place of residence of their family members, their photographs, or were directly threatened with the abduction of their relatives.

As a result, families find themselves in a situation of constant fear and enforced silence, which further complicates the documentation of crimes and creates additional obstacles to the search for missing persons.

4.3. Legal and financial obstacles

Families of missing persons face uncertainty due to the lack of clear understanding of how and where to seek state assistance. In Ukraine, there are two separate legislative mechanisms. **One is the Law of Ukraine “On the Legal Status of Persons Missing in Special Circumstances”** (with a registry maintained by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and financial support provisions). Separate provisions defining the rights and guarantees of civilians deprived of liberty as a result of the war are set out in the **Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Persons in Respect of Whom the Fact of Deprivation of Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine Has Been Established, and Their Family Members”** (with a different legal framework, registry, and administration through the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine).

Since the missing person may be held in places of detention, relatives often resort to both of these mechanisms.

According to human rights defenders, “the two registries do not overlap” and “information exchange has not been established” – a person whose status has changed (for example, it has been established that the person is held in places of detention in the temporarily occupied territories or in Russia) remains listed in both registries.

Even when documents are available, “in recent years civilians have not been receiving payments” – there are no funds (from an expert interview). To receive support as a person deprived of liberty, one must provide documentary proof of unlawful detention; however, if a person is held incommunicado, this cannot be verified.

4.4. Psychological and social consequences for families

The psychological consequences of enforced disappearances for families are profound and long-lasting. Relatives report chronic anxiety, depressive conditions, sleep disturbances, somatic symptoms, as well as feelings of guilt over their inability to protect their loved one.

Children are particularly vulnerable, growing up in an environment of constant uncertainty and fear.

The social consequences manifest in the forced isolation of families. Fear of potential reprisals compels many relatives to avoid public visibility, limit communication, and refrain from any forms of civic engagement. In some cases, families change their place of residence or sever social ties, further deepening their vulnerability.

In addition, families face serious economic consequences due to the need to spend money on searching for information, legal assistance, and medical treatment. Under conditions of occupation, access to social support is limited or absent, which further intensifies the economic pressure.

In some cases, families also face confiscation of property, blocking of bank accounts, or the forced re-registration of ownership.

4.5. Impact on local communities and social structure

At the level of local communities, enforced disappearances serve the function of undermining social trust and solidarity. When people disappear without explanation and without consequences for the perpetrators, a perception emerges that anyone could become the next victim. This leads to self-censorship, avoidance of horizontal ties, and a reduced willingness to support one another.

Communities are gradually losing their capacity for collective action, which is one of the key objectives of repressive policy. Such atomization of society complicates not only resistance to the occupation, but also the subsequent processes of recovery and reintegration after de-occupation.

Part 5:

Response of Ukraine's National Law Enforcement Agencies

The response of the State of Ukraine to cases of enforced disappearances of civilians is shaped by the context of armed aggression, the temporary occupation of part of its territory, and limitations in exercising effective control and justice. Despite these circumstances, the Ukrainian state recognizes enforced disappearances as one of the most serious crimes against the civilian population and is undertaking a range of measures aimed at documentation, investigation, and international legal response.

5.1. Scale of disproportion

The most telling indicator is the disparity between the scale of the problem and the scope of the response. With approximately 16,000 civilians unlawfully detained or missing under special circumstances (according to the Office of the Ombudsman), the Prosecutor's Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol is conducting procedural oversight in two criminal proceedings under Article 146-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, covering three individuals. Not a single indictment has been submitted to the court. No proceedings have been closed – but none have led to a conviction either.

5.2. Objective difficulties of investigations

Experts acknowledge the existence of real obstacles. According to human rights defenders, after 2022 the Prosecutor's Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol "has no witnesses who can be questioned – the person has disappeared, relatives cannot leave, a lawyer cannot leave, and the cases are simply left hanging." The situation is further complicated by the fact that "judges are increasingly insisting on summoning witnesses to court," even when written testimonies from the proceedings exist. For many cases after 2022, summoning witnesses to court is physically impossible. As one participant in an expert interview summarized, with regard to enforced disappearances, the situation is "a dead end."

5.3. Gaps in the accounting and monitoring system

The Ombudsman's Office noted that "the Secretariat of the Commissioner does not possess and has not produced information on the number of established cases of enforced disappearances" – meaning that no official centralized statistics are maintained. Three parallel recording systems exist (the Unified Register of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Information Bureau, and the Joint Center under the Security Service of Ukraine), but there is no integration between them.

The Main Directorate of the National Police in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the

of Sevastopol did not provide any response to the information request; the response deadline has expired (as of the date of analysis – February 2026). The Prosecutor’s Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the Office of the Ombudsman did provide responses; however, information on many specific monitoring questions is missing – in particular, regarding the existence of specialized training for investigators, standard investigation protocols, and mechanisms for informing relatives.

5.4. Positive steps

Despite the identified challenges, it should be noted that Ukraine has criminalized enforced disappearances as a separate article of the Criminal Code (Art. 146-1), established a register of missing persons, introduced a system of social guarantees for the families of the missing, and initiated cooperation with the International Criminal Court (submission in 2022). The Prosecutor’s Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol has confirmed that criminal proceedings are not being closed.

Summary

This consolidated report is the result of monitoring the practice of enforced disappearances in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine – namely, Crimea, and parts of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. It is based on a synthesis of information from various sources and aims to serve as a systematic and structured foundation for further human rights, research, and advocacy efforts.

The report demonstrates that enforced disappearances in the temporarily occupied territories are not isolated incidents, but rather a systematic state policy coordinated at the federal level of the Russian Federation, primarily carried out by the FSB, and accompanied by the coordinated efforts of all occupation authorities to conceal information and ensure impunity.

The practice is evolving and expanding: from targeted operations against activists in 2014 to mass repression against anyone showing signs of “disloyalty” in 2024–2025. At the same time, neither the occupying authorities nor – regrettably – Ukraine’s national law enforcement agencies, nor international institutions have demonstrated adequate effectiveness in countering this practice.

This report is conceived as a periodically updated document. It establishes a monitoring framework built around five research problem areas defined in the Monitoring Concept and seeks to consolidate prior work conducted by various organizations at different times and using different methodologies. The focus is placed specifically on enforced disappearances – as one of the most concealed and least documented human rights violations in the context of armed conflict.

Going forward, it is important to deepen work with the families of the disappeared, to expand coverage to new regions (particularly the informationally closed Zaporizhzhia oblast), to monitor the implementation of recommendations by international and national bodies, and to document new cases and new patterns – as the report demonstrates, the practice is steadily evolving.

Behind every figure and every example in this report stands a real person and a family living in conditions of painful uncertainty. Their right to truth, justice, and reparation is enshrined in international law and must be ensured in practice.