

Analytical Review of the Activities of the NGO “Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin” on Documenting War Crimes of the Russian Federation against the Civilian Population in Ukraine in November 2025

Executive Summary

The analytical review for November 2025 was prepared on the basis of an analysis of twenty (20) testimonies provided by individuals who were unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as well as by their close relatives. The testimonies cover the period 2022–2025 and concern the detention of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and their subsequent confinement in the occupied territories and in the Russian Federation.

The analysis indicates the existence of systemic and recurring patterns of unlawful deprivation of liberty accompanied by torture, cruel treatment, enforced disappearances, forced transfers, and gross violations of the right to a fair trial. Detentions are typically carried out without any legal grounds, with concealment of information about the persons' whereabouts, the use of unofficial detention sites, and subsequent transfer to pre-trial detention centers or penitentiary institutions in the occupied territories or in the Russian Federation.

The documented practices demonstrate that unlawful deprivation of liberty is used not as an isolated measure but as an instrument of intimidation, control over the civilian population, and persecution of persons perceived by the occupation authorities as disloyal. The overall pattern of identified violations suggests that these acts may be qualified as war crimes and crimes against humanity, underscoring the need for further documentation, legal assessment, and use in national and international accountability mechanisms.

Methodology and Sources

This analytical review was prepared on the basis of a qualitative analysis of testimonies provided by individuals unlawfully deprived of their liberty as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as well as witnesses to such events. The primary sources of information were semi-structured interviews with victims and their close relatives collected by documenters in November 2025 in compliance with the principles of informed consent, security, and anonymization.

In addition to direct testimonies, the analysis relied on materials from criminal proceedings whose existence or content was reported by respondents (including extracts from the Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations, notifications from investigative bodies, and procedural documents), as well as copies of medical documentation provided by victims or referenced by them, health certificates issued after release, decisions or materials of de facto “courts” of occupation administrations, and notifications of detention or transfer.

Information from open sources referenced by witnesses was also taken into account, including media publications, communications by human rights organizations, information from international organizations (including the ICRC), and responses from Ukrainian state authorities to information requests submitted by relatives regarding the whereabouts, status, or search for unlawfully detained individuals. The combined use of these sources made it possible to cross-verify certain facts, identify common patterns, and prepare a consolidated analytical review in line with standards for documenting violations of international humanitarian and international criminal law.

General Characteristics of the Testimony Set

During November 2025, documenters collected twenty testimonies concerning the unlawful deprivation of personal liberty of civilians by representatives of the armed formations of the Russian Federation and occupation administrations under its control in the period 2022–2025. The testimonies include both direct statements by victims and detailed accounts provided by close relatives who remain in constant contact with detained persons or are searching for them.

All documented cases bear indications of serious violations of international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and international human rights law, including the prohibition of arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and the right to a fair trial. In particular, witnesses and victims stated:

“They tortured me with varying intensity; I cannot specify the duration. They hit me in the stomach; I do not know who exactly. After the torture, I vomited. I was given food only once.”

“In Simferopol they feed you better than in Mariupol, where they often gave spoiled food. Here it is more or less normal, but they feed you like dogs. In Mariupol you could lie down, but in Simferopol the rules are strict—you either stand or sit; you are allowed to sleep lying down, but all day you have to stand, because it is considered a violation of the regime if you sit. They take you to the shower for five minutes once a week; in that time you have to undress, wash, and get dressed.”

“During torture in Simferopol they forced me to stand facing the wall with my legs spread; they put a garbage bag over my head, beat my kidneys and legs, and broke my ribs.”

“They asked whether I had sent money to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine and why I had not signed a contract with ‘Rosatom.’ They checked my phone and found Ukrainian patriotic slogans saved there. After that, they started beating me.”

“There were no detention conditions—there was no ventilation in the cell, and no outdoor exercise. Around 10 a.m. every day, soldiers or employees of the so-called ‘police’ would

come in, call out surnames, take some people for interrogations, beat them, and sometimes torture them with electric current.”

“A formal administrative court hearing took place for ‘using obscene language in a public place,’ but at that time the person was in the FSB office. They were given 12 days of administrative arrest. It was a complete fabrication: the lawyer’s arguments were not considered and witnesses to the detention were not summoned. This is what the occupiers do with all detainees—they first formalize an administrative detention and then fabricate a case.”

“When my mother felt unwell or lost consciousness, other women in the cell provided assistance, while the guards reacted only formally. The food was terrible; in fact, detainees in the pre-trial detention center survived thanks to parcels from relatives.”

Geography and Circumstances of Detention

Detentions occurred predominantly in the temporarily occupied territories of southern and eastern Ukraine, as well as in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea: Kherson region (Skadovsk, Nova Kakhovka, Stepanivka (2), Ivanivka, Hornostaivka, Bilozerka), Zaporizhzhia region (Blahovishchenka, Dniprovka, Dnipro-rudne), Donetsk region (Mariupol, Amvrosiivka, Mykilske, Novooleksandrivka), Kharkiv region (Izium, Husarivka), Sumy region (Velykyi Bobryk), and Crimea (Sevastopol, Yalta). In a number of cases, detentions took place directly at checkpoints or while crossing the administrative boundary with Crimea. The total number of documented cases of arbitrary detention and deprivation of liberty in the temporarily occupied territories is as follows:

Kherson region – 7 cases

Donetsk region – 4 cases

Zaporizhzhia region – 3 cases

Kharkiv region – 2 cases

Autonomous Republic of Crimea – 2 cases

Sumy region – 1 case

In more than two thirds of cases, detentions were carried out without presenting any documents, without explaining reasons, and without informing relatives of the place of detention. Those carrying out detentions often did not identify themselves, wore military or civilian clothing without insignia, and used masks or armbands, making identification impossible.

Based on the analysis of the documented testimonies, a clear set of actual and potential grounds for persecution can be identified, used by the occupation authorities of the Russian Federation as formal or informal pretexts for unlawful deprivation of liberty. The predominant reasons were accusations of so-called “high treason,” “espionage,” “terrorism,” or “preparing a terrorist attack,” which in most cases were based on a pro-Ukrainian civic stance, public support for Ukraine (including through social media), volunteer assistance to

the Armed Forces of Ukraine (financing, purchasing drones), or real or alleged cooperation with Ukrainian military forces and territorial defense. A separate group consists of cases of persecution due to professional activity or previous status (service in the police, work at strategic facilities, including the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant), as well as due to family ties with servicemen of Ukraine's Defense Forces. Some abductions and detentions bear the hallmarks of arbitrary repressive actions aimed at intimidating the local population and "filtering" civilians.

Profile of the Victims

The absolute majority of documented cases concern civilians. Victims include workers in civilian professions (salespersons, engineers, marketers, security guards), relatives of military personnel, former service members or individuals with prior experience in law enforcement bodies who were not serving at the time of detention. Cases were also recorded involving persons with disabilities and persons with severe chronic illnesses.

A gender analysis of the collected testimonies indicates that the overwhelming majority of detainees were men; however, in at least one quarter of cases the victims were women. Several testimonies emphasize the specific vulnerability of women during detention, in particular due to the lack of adequate medical assistance and psychological pressure.

Typology of Violations and Legal Qualification of Crimes

All analyzed cases involve unlawful deprivation of personal liberty. In a significant part of the testimonies, other grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law were also recorded, including torture and cruel treatment manifested through the use of electric current, beatings, suffocation, prolonged detention in stress positions, deprivation of food, sleep, and medical care. Some testimonies contain information about the deaths of other detainees as a result of torture, as well as torture and inhuman treatment of a person with a disability ("they shocked him with electricity and treated him brutally").

A systematic practice of fabricating criminal cases under provisions of the criminal legislation of the Russian Federation is also documented, including "high treason" (Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), "espionage" (Article 276), "commission of a terrorist act" (Article 229 of the "Criminal Code" of the terrorist organization "DPR"), "participation in a terrorist community" (Article 205.4), "participation in illegal armed formations" (Article 208), as well as administrative arrests for formal violations (e.g., "violation of curfew" and "using obscene language in a public place"), which in practice are used as an instrument for continued detention.

Overall, among the seventeen civilians unlawfully deprived of liberty identified in November 2025, criminal proceedings were initiated against nine individuals. Of these, seven are

serving sentences pursuant to convictions. Five individuals remain in incommunicado detention or are considered missing, while four were released outside official procedures.

Chains of Transfer

The analysis of twenty (20) testimonies makes it possible to reconstruct typical chains of transfer of detainees and to determine their quantitative and spatial characteristics. The data indicate the systematic nature of multi-stage transfers used as a tool of control, disorientation, and concealment of detention locations.

In sixteen of twenty testimonies (80%), two or more stages of transfer between different places of confinement were recorded. In nine cases (45%), the number of documented transfers involved three or more locations before final placement or the start of formalized criminal prosecution. The average number of transfers per individual based on available testimonies is between two and four stages, while the intervals between them varied from several days to several weeks. In seven cases (35%), detainees were not informed of their location for more than one month, creating a state of factual uncertainty consistent with indicators of temporary enforced disappearance.

Initial detentions occurred predominantly in the temporarily occupied territories of southern and eastern Ukraine—during filtration measures, searches, or document checks; in private homes, at checkpoints, or at workplaces. In fourteen of twenty cases, initial detention took place in unofficial or temporary places of confinement, including basements, local administration buildings, occupation “police” departments, or repurposed industrial sites. It was at this stage that physical or psychological violence was recorded in eleven testimonies (55%), including beatings, threats, sleep deprivation, and mock executions.

Subsequent stages of transfer show recurring routes that can be условно divided into two main models. The first model involves internal transfers within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. In eight cases (40%), detainees were moved between several settlements or detention locations without crossing the state border. Such transfers were often accompanied by complete isolation from the outside world and the absence of any registration (incommunicado detention). For example, persons were detained in Zaporizhzhia region (Enerhodar, Melitopol, settlements in Vasylivka district), initially held in basements or temporary holding facilities (including in Enerhodar and Melitopol), then transferred to Melitopol for “investigative actions” and pseudo-judicial proceedings, followed by further transfer to Pre-Trial Detention Center No. 2 in Mariupol, Pre-Trial Detention Center No. 1 in Donetsk, and/or Pre-Trial Detention Center No. 2 in Simferopol.

The second, more severe model—recorded in seven testimonies (35%)—involves transfer from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation. In these cases, routes included removal to transit points in the occupied territories, subsequent convoying through border areas, and placement in pre-trial detention centers, colonies, or other places of confinement in the Russian Federation. For instance, after

detention in Sevastopol, one person was transferred via Krasnodar (RF), Volgograd (RF), Kazan (RF), Irkutsk (RF) to Ulan-Ude (Republic of Buryatia, RF). Other persons, after convictions, were transferred from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to Saratov Oblast (RF) and the Republic of Mordovia (RF). Witnesses noted that during such transfers they were often blindfolded, vehicles were changed, and no information about the direction of travel was provided.

Conditions of Detention

In twelve of twenty testimonies (60%), multiple transfers were accompanied by deterioration of detention conditions: reduced access to food, water, medical care, and communication with the outside world. In ten cases (50%), detention conditions at subsequent stages were assessed as worse or significantly worse compared to earlier stages. Transfers often had not only a logistical but also a punitive function, serving as an additional means of pressure and punishment for refusal to cooperate or provide statements.

Detention conditions are generally described as overcrowded and unsanitary, with limited access to water, food, medicines, and outdoor exercise. Detention facilities are not adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, which is additionally used as a means of pressure on detainees and their relatives. In several cases, cells designed for 4–6 persons held 15 to 40 or more people. Contact with lawyers and relatives is systematically restricted or fully prohibited, and correspondence is censored.

Judicial Proceedings and Violations of the Right to a Fair Trial

In most cases, so-called “trials” take place with gross violations of basic fair trial guarantees. Testimonies indicate closed hearings, denial of access to relatives, the purely formal nature of defense by state-appointed lawyers, the use of “evidence” obtained under torture, and the absence of effective avenues of appeal. Sentences mentioned in the testimonies range up to 14–16 years of imprisonment without genuine proof of guilt.

Information about Other Victims and the Broader Context

Most witnesses reported other detainees with whom they were held, or known cases of torture, deaths, or disappearances. This indicates the mass and systemic nature of the practice of unlawful deprivation of liberty, far exceeding individual cases and pointing to a coordinated policy of persecution of the civilian population.

Conclusions

The totality of the analyzed testimonies confirms persistent patterns of unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture, enforced disappearances, and the imitation of “justice” in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. These acts bear the hallmarks of war crimes and crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute of the ICC and require further systematic

documentation, legal qualification, and use within national and international accountability mechanisms.

The identified quantitative indicators and the geography of transfers confirm that unlawful deprivation of liberty is not carried out as an isolated act but as a process involving a series of coordinated actions by different structures. The recurrence of routes, the similarity of detention conditions, and the multi-stage nature of transfers indicate the existence of an organized practice relevant to the qualification of these acts as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Reconstructing chains of transfer makes it possible not only to establish individual circumstances of specific cases but also to identify systemic patterns that can be used for further criminal investigations, advocacy, and international legal response.

Recommendations

Taking into account the results of the analysis of testimonies of witnesses and individuals unlawfully deprived of liberty as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and the identified recurring patterns of violations of international humanitarian and international criminal law, the following measures are recommended:

General Part

Law enforcement agencies, state institutions, international institutions, NGOs and international organizations should ensure continuous, systematic documentation of facts of unlawful deprivation of liberty, including circumstances of detention, places and conditions of confinement, chains of transfer, the use of torture and cruel treatment, and related judicial or pseudo-judicial proceedings. Documentation should be conducted in accordance with standards of admissibility of evidence in national and international criminal proceedings.

Law enforcement agencies should integrate the collected testimonies into the work of Ukrainian pre-trial investigation bodies and use them to qualify relevant acts as war crimes and, where the necessary elements are present, crimes against humanity, including enforced disappearances, unlawful imprisonment, torture, and persecution of the civilian population.

State institutions should ensure proper recognition of the status of persons unlawfully deprived of liberty, including access to social, legal, and psychological assistance. Recognition procedures should be people-centered, should not impose an excessive burden of proof on victims, and should take into account the specific nature of crimes committed under occupation.

Law enforcement agencies, state institutions, international institutions, NGOs and international organizations should strengthen international cooperation to exchange information on places of detention of civilian hostages, conditions of their detention, and responsible persons, and should use the collected materials in international mechanisms, including within the ICC framework, universal jurisdiction, and sanctions regimes.

Law enforcement agencies, state institutions, international institutions, NGOs and international organizations should continue regular analysis of victims' testimonies to identify new trends, update the typology of violations, and assess the evolution of unlawful detention practices in the context of ongoing armed aggression.

Special Part

- Law enforcement agencies should treat convoying and forced transfer of civilians, including deportation to the territory of the Russian Federation, as independent episodes of international crimes. Such acts should be documented separately from the initial unlawful detention and should include establishing the role of escorts, administrations of detention facilities, and so-called "judicial" bodies in the temporarily occupied territories. These facts should provide grounds for opening separate criminal proceedings under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, taking into account the cumulative nature of violations.
- Law enforcement agencies and state institutions should prioritize forensic medical and forensic psychiatric examinations in accordance with the UN Istanbul Protocol, including documenting consequences of torture and cruel treatment (electric-shock injuries, systematic beatings) and psychological disorders, including PTSD. It is advisable to establish a centralized repository of such expert conclusions to preserve evidence, avoid re-traumatization, and identify typical patterns of violence.
- Law enforcement agencies and state institutions should systematically collect and document documentary confirmations related to the registration of detainees, including correspondence and confirmations from the ICRC, registration data in detention facilities, information on "delivery" and individual identifiers of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation, and extracts from "personal accounts" or electronic record systems. The refusal by "appointed" or occupation-controlled lawyers to provide case materials to families or victims' representatives should be documented as obstruction of the right to defense and access to information.
- Law enforcement agencies and state institutions should develop a separate procedural approach to qualifying the activities of so-called "courts" in the temporarily occupied territories. Detentions in such "court" premises, unlawful verdicts, and subsequent transfer beyond the occupied territory to the Russian Federation should be documented as a complex crime combining unlawful deprivation of liberty, deprivation of the right to a fair trial, and deportation of the civilian population.
- Executive authorities of the social and humanitarian sector, including the Ministry of Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, should develop specialized treatment and rehabilitation programs for persons released from unlawful detention. Such programs should address chronic illnesses and

complications (cardiovascular and renal pathologies), consequences of prolonged starvation (anorexia, critical weight deficit), dental damage, and provide long-term psychosocial support for families of persons held incommunicado or considered missing. Parallel efforts should strengthen technical cooperation with the ICRC to verify transfer routes and detainees' current status.

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine should advocate for ICRC access to specific pre-trial detention centers and colonies in the Russian Federation where, according to documented testimonies, civilians unlawfully deprived of liberty are held, including facilities in Krasnodar, Volgograd, Kazan, Irkutsk, the Republic of Buryatia, Saratov Oblast, and the Republic of Mordovia.
- International institutions and human rights NGOs should use documented transfer routes, detention conditions, legal qualifications under the criminal legislation of the Russian Federation, and documented treatment practices to prepare targeted submissions to the International Criminal Court and UN special procedures on torture and enforced disappearances, and to initiate targeted personal and sectoral sanctions against the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation and related “judicial” and administrative bodies.

Organizational Context and Cumulative Indicators

Since 2022, documenters of the NGO “Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin” have identified and interviewed more than 620 individuals—witnesses and victims of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and other international crimes against the civilian population. Documented violations include, primarily, unlawful deprivation of personal liberty, as well as shelling of civilian infrastructure, appropriation of private property by occupation forces, and other related crimes.

As of 30 November 2025, information was identified and documented regarding 463 civilians unlawfully deprived of personal liberty in the context of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Of these, 17 individuals were identified and documented during testimony collection in November 2025.

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