ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NGO “ASSOCIATION OF RELATIVES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS OF THE KREMLIN”

IN DOCUMENTING RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES AGAINST CIVILIANS IN UKRAINE

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SUMMARY

This analytical review for July 2026 was prepared based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of twenty testimonies concerning unlawful deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances, incommunicado detention, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment, the unlawful transfer of civilians, politically motivated criminal prosecution, and violations of the right to a fair trial in the context of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine.

By year of initial detention, the highest concentration of cases occurred in 2022. Thirteen of the twenty main victims, or 65%, were detained in 2022. Three, or 15%, were detained in 2023; two, or 10%, in 2025; and one person each, or 5% each, in 2018 and 2024.

As of the time of documentation, only one of the twenty primary victims had been released. One man died as a result of unlawful detention and torture. The remaining eighteen individuals—that is, 90% of the primary group—continued to be held in places of detention or had an unknown current whereabouts within the context of prolonged deprivation of liberty, according to the information available in the testimonies. For seven of these eighteen individuals, the last known facility as of the time of documentation has not been reliably established, or information regarding their whereabouts remains contradictory. In one of the most complex cases, following a 20-year sentence and another transfer, the family has no idea where the victim is currently being held.

The gender composition of the main group is distinctly uneven: eighteen of the twenty victims are men, accounting for 90%, while two victims are women, accounting for 10%. At the same time, the gender composition of the sources themselves is the opposite: sixteen out of twenty respondents—that is, 80%—are women. These are predominantly the wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, granddaughters, or former partners of the detained men. Thus, the July testimonies once again highlight both the predominant targeting of men among the primary victims and the disproportionate burden placed on women to undertake the prolonged task of searching for the detainees, communicating with government agencies, lawyers, and international organizations, and determining the routes of their transfers and the detainees' health status.

Signs of enforced disappearance, prolonged incommunicado detention, or deliberate concealment of whereabouts are evident in at least fifteen of the twenty primary victims—that is, 75 percent. This goes beyond merely the lack of information in the first hours or days following detention. In some cases, families did not know the place of detention for months or over a year, received responses stating that the individuals were allegedly not held in the relevant facilities, or relied exclusively on released cellmates and unofficial channels.

At least seventeen of the twenty victims—or 85%—were held in two or more places of detention, transit points, or during transfers. At least thirteen people—or 65% of the main group—were forcibly transferred from the occupied territory

of Ukraine to the Russian Federation without being informed of the reasons or routes. For some victims, the routes also included territory in Belarus.

One of the most telling examples is the route taken by a civilian man detained at Chongar: Simferopol, the first leg of the journey by freight train to Ulyanovsk, lasting two weeks and three days, a return to Simferopol, and subsequent transfers to the Russian Federation via Krasnodar, Vladimir, Yekaterinburg, and finally Ulan-Ude in Buryatia. Another typical route involved two brothers from the Kyiv region, who were detained at the same time, transported with their hands tied and bags over their heads toward Belarus, and subsequently taken to Novozybkov (Russia); in Russia, the brothers were separated, after which their routes diverged to different facilities.

Direct or sufficiently specific information regarding torture or inhuman treatment is available for at least eight of the twenty main victims, or 40 percent. If all individualized reports of beatings are taken into account, the figure amounts to at least ten people, or 50 percent. Among the methods described are electric shock torture, systematic beatings, threats of murder and maiming, mock executions, beatings while being forced to stand naked in the cold, prolonged forced standing, deprivation of sleep and food, as well as threats of violence against family members.

Signs of possible conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) require special attention. In at least three of the twenty main cases—or 15%—actions were documented that can be preliminarily classified as CRSV.

The report contains direct information on criminal proceedings or court cases involving at least eight of the twenty victims, or 40 percent. There are reports of convictions for seven individuals. For six of these convictions, the sentences are specified quite clearly: 20 years, 19 years, 12 years, 11 years, 8 years and 6 months, and 5 years. In four of the twenty main cases—that is, 20% of the entire body of evidence—Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, concerning so-called “treason,” is cited.

Notable cases documented in July 2026 include the death of a man unlawfully detained in the basement of PC-15 in Polohy; the case of a man detained at the age of 18 directly on the territory of the Russian Federation (in Volgograd) after charitable transfers in support of Ukraine were discovered on his phone; and the detention of civilians as prisoners of war.

Taken together, the body of evidence from July reveals not isolated, uniform incidents of detention, but a sequence of interconnected practices: initial forcible or covert apprehension; confiscation of phones, documents, and personal belongings; scrutiny of digital data, political views, and past military service; detention incommunicado; transfers between unofficial locations, pretrial detention centers, and penal colonies in remote regions of the Russian Federation; torture and coercion to extract confessions; and, in some cases, the subsequent formalization of the initially unlawful detention through Russian criminal proceedings and convictions.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This analytical review is based on a qualitative analysis of twenty semi-structured testimonies collected by documenters from the NGO "Association of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners" in July 2026. All factual information, quantitative indicators, geographic data, descriptions of detention conditions, transfers, torture, court proceedings, and information about other victims in this review are based exclusively on the body of testimonies from July 2026. Information from open sources, court documents, letters, video footage, or reports from government agencies is taken into account only to the extent that it is directly reproduced or described in the testimonies themselves; no independent external verification of such materials was conducted for this review.

The composition of the sources is important for assessing the completeness of the data. Only one of the twenty testimonies was provided directly by the primary victim, who personally endured prolonged unlawful detention. Seventeen testimonies were provided by family members of the primary victims: wives, mothers, daughters, a sister, a granddaughter, a son, a father, and a brother. One testimony was provided by a former civil partner, and another by a friend and direct eyewitness to the main victim's detention, who later himself experienced a separate, brief episode of unlawful deprivation of liberty. This means that information regarding the time of disappearance, the search efforts, correspondence, attorneys, court proceedings, and transfers is presented much more comprehensively than information regarding specific methods of torture within places of detention.

That is precisely why the absence of details in a specific testimony regarding beatings, torture, sexual violence, or inadequate conditions is not considered proof that such violations did not occur. Relatives repeatedly explain that correspondence is censored; detainees write only a standard phrase such as "everything is fine," cannot disclose their location, or avoid mentioning acts of violence. In the case of a man from the Sumy region, his sister explicitly states that he writes practically nothing about his conditions or state of health, as providing accurate information could lead to his correspondence being blocked. Accordingly, the torture rate in this review represents the minimum confirmed rate, rather than an estimate of the actual prevalence.

The primary unit of quantitative analysis is defined as a unique primary victim. As part of the documentation regarding one of the victims from Kupiansk, two witnesses were interviewed separately to more fully establish the circumstances of his arrest, subsequent detention, and transfer; accordingly, these two testimonies are counted as a single case in the quantitative analysis. At the same time, one of the testimonies refers to two brothers who were detained together, each of whom is counted as a separate victim. Thus, the dataset includes twenty primary victims. The number of primary detention incidents is nineteen. All other cellmates, family members, individuals detained alongside the primary victims, those who died, individuals mentioned

by released captives, and other identified victims are analyzed separately.

For each primary victim, thematic coding was performed according to the following categories: gender; approximate age at the time of detention; professional and social profile; previous military or law enforcement service; health status; date and location of initial detention; nature of the detention site; entities involved in the abduction; search and seizure of property; digital data and probable motives for persecution; period of concealment of whereabouts; initial place of detention; all known stages of transfer; transfer to the Russian Federation; torture and other cruel treatment; possible signs of torture; food, water, sleep, sanitation, medical care, access to correspondence and a lawyer; criminal cases and court proceedings; sentence; current status; as well as information about other victims.

Age was calculated using the year of birth and the year of detention; therefore, the age figures are approximate, as exact dates of birth were not taken into account in the statistical calculation. The approximate age range is from 18 to about 70 years, with an average age of about 45.5 years. Six of the twenty victims—that is, 30%—were approximately 60 years of age or older at the time of detention.

The legal assessment in this document is analytical in nature and does not constitute a definitive legal classification. It is conducted within the framework of international humanitarian law and international criminal law, taking into account that a final criminal classification requires establishing the status of each victim, the status of the perpetrators, the connection of a specific act to the armed conflict, the form of intent, the context of the occupation, and other elements of the relevant criminal offense. Therefore, the legal section uses phrases such as “may constitute,” “contains elements of,” “requires verification,” and “provided that the relevant contextual elements are established.”

The collection of testimony was conducted in accordance with the principles of informed consent, respondent safety, and the anonymization of personal data. The legal assessment was conducted in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and international human rights law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Convention Against Torture. This includes, in particular, the prohibition of arbitrary and unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture, inhuman treatment, unlawful transfer of protected persons, taking of hostages, intentional killing, persecution, and denial of the right to a fair trial. The specific criminal classification of each incident requires establishing the status of the victim, the perpetrators, the connection of the act to the armed conflict, the form of intent, and other elements of the relevant criminal offense.

1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BODY OF EVIDENCE

The most significant common feature of the July body of evidence is the duration of detention. Only one primary victim has been released, and one man has died. The remaining eighteen individuals remain in detention or have an unknown current whereabouts. For a significant number of them, this has been a long-term detention that began in the spring of 2022. Accordingly, the body of evidence demonstrates the transformation of initial detention into a long-term system of isolation, transfer between detention facilities, and, in some cases, formal criminal prosecution.

The practice of concealing a person's fate and whereabouts is particularly pronounced. In at least 75% of the main cases, there was a period when the family did not know where the person was, received no official confirmation, or was met with denials of the detention. The duration of such periods ranges from several weeks to many months and over a year. In one case, the family did not know for about half a year or more that a civilian man who had disappeared near Nizhyn had been taken to the Russian Federation; the first information came only from a handwritten letter. In another case, the family had no reliable information for about a year and a half until they saw the victim in a video.

Another systemic feature is the gap between the actual deprivation of liberty and its formal documentation. Some people were initially simply taken from their homes, off the street, at a checkpoint, during a public demonstration, or at an airport without any clear procedure. Only later, in some cases, did official records, "administrative" arrests, criminal charges, pretrial measures, and sentences appear. The most obvious example is a young man who, after being detained in Volgograd, was subjected to administrative detention twice in succession; after completing his second term, he was not released but was officially detained as part of a criminal case for "treason."

In half of the main cases—involving about ten out of twenty individuals—the detentions took place directly in their homes or on the premises surrounding their homes. Other locations included roads or railroad tracks, checkpoints, streets, sites of peaceful rallies, airport grounds, and other public spaces. This diversity shows that the practice was not limited exclusively to checks at checkpoints or "filtration": some individuals were specifically sought out at their places of residence, some were identified during checks of their phones or documents, and some were detained for public pro-Ukrainian activism.

For at least eight of the twenty victims—that is, 40 percent—there are explicit accounts of searches of their homes, garages, or other property either before or during their detention. Items seized included phones, laptops, computers, passports, bank cards, SIM cards, documents, registered hunting weapons, patriotic symbols, books, cash, jewelry, and other property. In the Berdyansk case, computer equipment, documents, money, jewelry, a Ukrainian flag, books, and other property were seized without any official records being drawn

up. In the Polohy case, searches took place five or six times, and during various incidents, cash, jewelry, and five officially registered hunting rifles were seized.

Digital data plays a particularly significant role. In at least seven major cases—or 35%—a phone, social media accounts, photographs, correspondence, bank transfers, or other digital traces served as the direct basis for detention, interrogation, or subsequent charges. These include photographs of Russian military equipment, posts about destroyed equipment, viewing a port map, pro-Ukrainian messages, membership in a chat group, use of Ukrainian documents, contacts, and charitable donations to Ukrainian foundations. In the case of a young man from Donetsk Oblast, the main evidence in the criminal case was charitable donations totaling approximately 5,200 hryvnias, which were discovered on his phone.

Among the motives for detention, as directly or indirectly described by respondents, the most prominent were a pro-Ukrainian stance, participation in peaceful resistance to the occupation, volunteering, passing on information about Russian military equipment, prior participation in the ATO, former military service, refusal to accept a Russian passport, Ukrainian documents, charitable donations in support of Ukraine, ties to Ukrainian organizations, and membership in the Crimean Tatar community. At the same time, in several cases, relatives are unable to determine the specific reason for the detention at all.

The available evidence also indicates the regular exploitation of the undefined legal status of civilians. Some individuals were effectively registered by the Russian side or the detention facility administrations as “prisoners of war,” although the respondents describe them as civilians. Two brothers from the Kyiv region, for example, did not have active military status; however, according to their mother, the Russian side treated them as prisoners of war. A similar pattern runs through other cases, where civilians were prepared for exchange alongside military personnel but were later returned to detention precisely because of their civilian status.

2. GEOGRAPHY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTIONS

Geographically, the nineteen main incidents of detention span nine regions of Ukraine, including the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, as well as one incident on the territory of the Russian Federation. If we take twenty unique victims as the unit of measurement, Kyiv and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts each have four victims, or 20% of the total. Kherson Oblast, including the incident at Chongar, accounts for three people, or 15%. Sumy and Chernihiv Oblasts each have two people, or 10%. One victim each—5% of the total—is accounted for by the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the Volgograd region of the Russian Federation.

The Zaporizhzhia cluster includes four cases of varying nature: the direct arrest of a pro-Ukrainian activist in Berdiansk; the persecution of a pensioner from the village of Prodorodne for an alleged money transfer; the detention of a man in Tokmak, after which his whereabouts effectively disappeared from the information available to his family; and the detention of an elderly business executive in Polohy, who died shortly after being subjected to torture. Taken together, these cases demonstrate both the work of the FSB and formalized persecution, as well as the activities of unofficial places of detention and lethal violence.

The Berdyansk incident stands out for its level of detail. At night, armed individuals blocked the street, broke down the gate, held the couple at gunpoint, conducted a search without witnesses, and seized their property. The man was initially taken out wearing only a T-shirt and underwear; the woman, who was bleeding and required regular medication, was forced to undress completely in the presence of armed men. She later went through the command post and the penal colony and provided detailed information about the system of interrogations and torture.

The Kherson case involves a man detained in Chongar during a family trip, a Crimean Tatar taken from his home in the Henichesk district, and an ATO veteran detained in the village of Chervone in the Beryslav district. In the latter two cases, the detainees' past military or civic activities were directly linked by their captors to their persecution. In the Henichesk case, after his arrest, the man was beaten, had his head covered, and was taken to the basement of a former vocational school; he was subsequently transported through Chongar, Simferopol, remote Russian facilities, and a penal colony in Buryatia.

The Kyiv group includes four victims in three main incidents. One elderly man was detained near the village of Blystavitsy; he was initially held in a private home and in an open-air pit, after which he was transported through Belarus to Russia. Another young civilian was detained in the village of Kozarovychi after Russian military personnel linked him to pro-Ukrainian activities and the transmission of information. Two brothers were captured simultaneously on March 19, 2022, while returning from a neighboring village. They and other villagers were forced into a truck with their hands tied and bags over their heads and taken in the direction of Belarus.

The Sumy case consists of two fundamentally different situations. In one instance, a man was taken from his home during the occupation without a search, without an explanation, and without formal charges; only later, through the Red Cross, did the family learn that he was being held in unlawful detention, and as of June 2026, they received information that he was being held at Penal Colony No. 10 in Mordovia (Russian Federation). In another case, three men were stopped during the retreat of Russian forces; their phones were searched, and photographs of Russian military equipment and political content were discovered; they were beaten and deported to the Kursk Region of the Russian Federation.

In the Chernihiv region, a civilian man went missing while attempting to walk home from Nizhyn; he later reported in a letter that he had initially been held in

Kursk (Russian Federation) and was subsequently transferred to the Rostov region. Another was detained near Lukashivka; subsequently, information about him came from various locations, including Kursk (Russian Federation), the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Kamensk-Shakhtinsky (Russian Federation), and the Perm Krai (Russian Federation). The latter case is particularly telling regarding the critical state of his health: in 2026, a released captive reported that detainees were forced to stand for sixteen hours a day and were not allowed to sit down, and the victim himself was diagnosed with active tuberculosis.

The Donetsk case began back in 2018, long before the full-scale invasion. The man was detained in an apartment in Donetsk along with two other people, one of whom was a woman. The first known place of detention was "Izolyatsia," followed by Donetsk Pretrial Detention Center No. 5, and later a pretrial detention center in Rostov-on-Don (Russian Federation). This is one of the longest-running cases in the database: the man has been in custody for over seven years, was sentenced to 20 years in prison, and his current whereabouts are unknown to his family following his transfer.

The Crimean case involves an elderly man with an openly pro-Ukrainian stance who was detained by FSB officers on September 30, 2025. According to the report described in the testimony, prohibited symbols and literature were allegedly found during a search of his apartment; however, the same document noted that no evidence of a criminal offense or administrative violation was found. Despite this, the man is being prosecuted under Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. The testimony contains information about psychological pressure and a confession obtained through fear of torture.

In the Luhansk region, a pensioner and former head of an energy company was detained. After searches, he was transported through Antratsyt, Luhansk, and Rostov-on-Don (Russian Federation). In June 2026, he received a 19-year sentence, after which he was taken from the pretrial detention center to an unknown location.

The Kharkiv case is based on two testimonies regarding a single victim. The man, a local entrepreneur, city council member, and former ATO participant, took part in a peaceful protest against the Russian occupation of Kupiansk on March 1, 2022. An eyewitness saw him among the participants in a procession heading toward a Russian checkpoint. After coming into contact with Russian military personnel, he disappeared, and subsequent information about his detention was fragmentary and contradictory.

The Volgograd case stands apart from the occupation-related incidents. An 18-year-old resident of occupied Donetsk Oblast traveled to the Russian Federation on his own, intending to fly to Turkey, but was detained at the airport because of his Ukrainian passport and the contents of his phone. For this reason, this case is not included in the statistical figure for forced removal from the occupied territory, although the subsequent beatings, administrative arrests, criminal prosecution, and 12-year sentence remain subject to a separate legal assessment.

3. PROFILE OF THE VICTIMS

The predominance of men is one of the most obvious characteristics of the group. Eighteen of the main victims are men; only two are women. However, the men do not constitute a homogeneous social or professional group. Among them are a taxi driver, a tractor operator, a plumber, an employee in the advertising structures industry, a gardener and a loader, a company director, a former manager of an energy facility, an entrepreneur and a local council member, retirees, a young civilian, people without formal employment, as well as people who were involved in volunteer work or homemaking.

None of the twenty primary victims was described by respondents as an active-duty member of the regular Armed Forces of Ukraine at the time of their initial detention. At the same time, at least eight individuals—or 40%—had some form of military service in their past, ranging from Soviet conscription or professional service to participation in the ATO. At least three had clearly documented prior experience participating in the ATO. In a number of cases, this factor was used as a pretext for persecution many years after the end of their service.

It is telling that repressive practices are not limited to people with a military background. Among those targeted are a pensioner accused of transferring 500 hryvnias, an accountant and a volunteer, a young man persecuted for possessing Ukrainian documents and making charitable donations, a civilian employee of a heating utility, a beekeeper, a tractor driver, and others. In this sense, the common risk factor is often not actual participation in combat operations, but rather the perception of a person as disloyal to the occupying authorities.

The approximate average age of those affected at the time of detention is 45.5 years. The youngest was approximately 18 years old, and the oldest was about 70. Six, or 30%, were 60 years of age or older. This age distribution is directly relevant to assessing detention conditions, as a significant proportion of older individuals already had chronic illnesses prior to their detention.

At least twelve of the twenty victims—that is, at least 60%—had significant medical vulnerabilities or chronic illnesses prior to their detention. These included congenital heart defects, hypertension, complications from severe COVID-19, a history of tuberculosis, hepatitis, heart problems and shortness of breath, spinal disorders, the aftereffects of traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision problems, gastrointestinal diseases, severe gout and mobility impairments, neck injuries, chronic pain, and other vulnerable conditions.

In many cases, their health deteriorated significantly after their detention. The family of a man sentenced to 20 years in prison reports spinal and leg injuries resulting from torture. A man transferred to Buryatia (Russian Federation) has experienced hearing loss, and continues to suffer from shortness of breath, heart problems, and hypertension; his family reports that he is not receiving adequate treatment. A young man deported to the Perm Krai (Russian Federation) has been diagnosed with active tuberculosis. An elderly woman, who, according to her granddaughter, was healthy prior to her detention, was diagnosed with dementia while in prison.

Pro-Ukrainian civic activism is a distinct element of the profile. Various testimonies mention participation in a peaceful rally, volunteering to assist the Ukrainian military, pro-Ukrainian publications, photographing Russian military equipment, refusing a Russian passport, using Ukrainian documents, and providing financial support to Ukrainian charitable organizations.

The two main female victims represent different profiles. The first is an active middle-aged woman, an accountant and volunteer, who was detained in Berdiansk and endured torture and 83 days of unlawful detention. The second is a retiree, a former nurse, who was persecuted for allegedly providing financial support to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and was subsequently sentenced to 11 years in prison. These two cases illustrate specific gender- and age-related vulnerabilities: forced undressing and humiliation while menstruating in the first case, and a sharp decline in cognitive health and de facto isolation from her family in the second.

At the same time, the gender aspect extends far beyond the two main women affected. The testimonies describe a wife who was pushed and beaten with a rifle butt while her husband was being detained; female co-detainees who were tortured, stripped, or detained because of family ties; as well as mothers and wives who have been searching for years and effectively serve as the primary link between the detainee and Ukrainian institutions.

4. TYPOLOGY OF VIOLATIONS AND CLASSIFICATION OF CRIMES

The basic category underlying the entire body of July testimonies is unlawful deprivation of liberty without a transparent, accessible, and due process. In all twenty main cases, there was a period during which the individual was effectively under the control of the Russian military, the FSB, the Russian National Guard, occupation authorities, or the administration of the place of detention, but the family did not have adequate access to information regarding the legal basis for the detention, the place of detention, or effective legal representation. The subsequent initiation of a criminal case or the issuance of a court ruling does not, in and of itself, resolve questions regarding the legality of the initial detention, treatment during incommunicado detention, forced displacement, or the use of torture.

If a specific individual had the status of a protected civilian at the time of deprivation of liberty, and the act had the requisite connection to an international armed conflict, unlawful detention may constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime.

The second central category is enforced disappearance or prolonged concealment of whereabouts. In at least fifteen cases, detention was accompanied by a refusal to confirm the fact of detention, contradictory reports, or prolonged failure to disclose the person’s whereabouts. The most obvious examples include the seven-month concealment of a man in Simferopol, the

years-long uncertainty regarding a man from Kupiansk, the disappearance of a man from Tokmak following his initial detention, as well as the denial that an elderly man was held at PC-15 (the former Road Maintenance Unit No. 15, where underground bunker facilities had been set up), where, according to a fellow detainee, he actually remained until his death.

Enforced disappearance, when accompanied by the necessary contextual elements, may constitute a crime against humanity. At the same time, the body of twenty testimonies alone is not sufficient to independently establish a widespread or systematic attack on the civilian population or a corresponding state or organizational policy. Rather, it contains a significant set of incidents that can be used to examine such a broader context in conjunction with other evidence.

The third key category is torture and cruel treatment. The body of testimony most specifically describes torture by electric shock. A direct victim from Berdyansk describes a device called a "tapik," two wires attached to her feet, simultaneous threats to bring in and beat her husband, and the presence of five staff members during the torture. The case of a Crimean Tatar also reports electric shock torture, psychological pressure, and a threat to cut off his genitals with a knife.

In other cases, the violence included severe beatings to the point of losing the physical ability to stand, beatings during interrogations, forced prolonged standing, sleep deprivation, starvation, exposure to the cold, threats of murder and being taken to the forest, mock executions, and violence aimed at extracting confessions needed by the occupying authorities. According to reports from those released, two brothers in Novozybkov were constantly beaten, were not even allowed to sit, and were regularly taken for interrogations; one of them was beaten so severely that he collapsed.

The most tragic consequence of the violence was the death of a man from Polohy. According to a fellow detainee and his family, he was brutally tortured while in custody; news of his death emerged approximately nine days after his arrest. This incident warrants an investigation, at a minimum, into possible intentional homicide, death resulting from torture, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. Particular evidentiary value should be attached to the testimonies of fellow detainees, documents regarding the burial and exhumation, the identification of those who controlled Detention Center No. 15, and a forensic medical assessment of the cause of death.

Sexualized violence requires separate legal attention. The threat to cut off genitalia with a knife during torture is clearly sexualized in nature and may be considered a threat of sexual violence or a sexualized form of torture, depending on the established context and intent. Forcing a woman to strip completely naked in the presence of armed individuals—especially while she is bleeding and completely dependent on her detainers—may also constitute sexualized humiliation. Forcing men to strip and taking them out into the cold while beating them requires a similar assessment. The fact that some of these acts are directed at men is important for preventing a narrow understanding of SGBV as exclusively violence against women.

The deportation of at least thirteen key victims from the occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation constitutes a separate category of crimes. The individuals were transported under guard, following forcible detention, without the ability to freely refuse the transfer and without the possibility of returning. Some of the routes passed through Belarus. Provided that the status of a protected person and other necessary elements are established, such actions may constitute unlawful transfer or deportation as a war crime.

It is important to distinguish the detention of a young man in Volgograd from these thirteen cases. He arrived in the Russian Federation of his own accord, so the factual element of forced cross-border transfer is absent in his case. Instead, his case is illustrative of persecution based on Ukrainian identity, documents, anti-war beliefs, and financial support for Ukraine.

Criminal prosecution under Russian law is the fourth major category of documented violations of international humanitarian law. In eight key cases, criminal or judicial proceedings are known to be underway. The "treason" charge has been applied to at least four individuals. Other charges relate to participation in groups that the Russian side associates with the Crimean Tatar movement, "terrorism," handling explosive materials, or other acts. With regard to the occupied territories, the extension of the occupying state's criminal legislation—and the punishment of individuals for loyalty to their own state, the use of Ukrainian documents, or political statements or actions that are not criminal under the law of the occupying state—requires a separate assessment.

In some cases, criminalization is closely linked to digital data. A transfer of 500 hryvnias, transfers totaling approximately 5,200 hryvnias, photographs of military equipment, Facebook posts, Ukrainian chat rooms, and other digital traces were interpreted as evidence of disloyalty or criminal activity. This forms a distinct analytical pattern of progression from phone searches to imprisonment, and subsequently to formal charges.

Such persecution based on political views, Ukrainian identity, refusal to integrate into the occupation system, charitable support for Ukraine, or ethnic affiliation—when considered alongside broader contextual elements—may be relevant to the analysis of persecution as a crime against humanity. At the same time, the twenty testimonies from July are not, on their own, sufficient to prove all the contextual elements of such a crime.

The testimonies also include instances of unlawful seizure of property. During searches, cash, jewelry, electronics, phones, documents, a car, and other items were seized without following proper procedures. Such incidents must be documented separately from unlawful deprivation of liberty, as they may require separate classification depending on the specific method, purpose, and connection to the armed conflict.

Two brothers and several other detainees were subjected to forced unpaid labor—repair and maintenance work under the administration's supervision, in an environment where refusal could result in punishment or beatings. These

facts require a separate assessment regarding the permissibility of such labor for the relevant category of detainees, the nature of the coercion, and the conditions under which it was performed.

In a number of cases, the occupying forces used threats against family members. A woman was threatened with having her husband brought in and beaten while she was being tortured with electric shocks. Another victim was threatened with harm to his family. However, the available evidence is insufficient to automatically classify such cases as hostage-taking: to do so, it must be established whether the detention or threat was directly linked to a demand that a third party take or refrain from taking a specific action.

5. TRANSIT CHAINS

Transit chains are one of the most revealing aspects of the July dataset. They demonstrate that unlawful deprivation of liberty is often not confined to a single facility: people are transferred from unofficial basements and command posts to pretrial detention centers, and subsequently to penal colonies in remote regions of the Russian Federation. At least seventeen of the twenty main victims went through two or more of these stages.

In the Donetsk case, a man was detained in his apartment on November 22, 2018. His first known place of detention was “Izolyatsia” in Donetsk, where he remained until approximately summer or early fall 2019. He was then transferred to the basement of the Donetsk Pretrial Detention Center and later to Pretrial Detention Center No. 5, where, according to his family, he was held from approximately September 2019 until 2023. After that, the man was transported to the Russian Federation: first to Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 in Rostov-on-Don for about half a year or longer, then to Pretrial Detention Center No. 5 in the same city. Following his final trial and a 20-year sentence, he was transferred again, and his current whereabouts are unknown to his family.

A man from the Sumy region was taken from his home in early March 2022. The first leg of his journey is completely unknown to his family. It was only through the Red Cross in 2022 that confirmation was received that he was being held captive. Starting in the fall of 2022, rare handwritten letters began to arrive. As of June 16, 2026, the Coordination Headquarters’ online portal indicated that he was being held at Penal Colony No. 10 in the Republic of Mordovia. The evidence does not identify any intermediate facilities between the place of detention and Mordovia.

In the Crimean case, the man was detained on September 30, 2025. For seven months and thirteen days, his whereabouts were concealed. The family sent numerous inquiries to authorities in Crimea and neighboring regions of the Russian Federation, and some unofficial reports pointed to a possible location in Rostov-on-Don. It was not until May 2026 that the lawyer received an official response stating that the victim was being held in Pretrial Detention Center No. 2 in Simferopol. This case is significant because the “chain of transfers” turned out to be largely a false trail created to mislead: the main problem lay not in the

numerous transfers, but in the concealment of the actual place of detention.

A civilian man who disappeared while traveling from Nizhyn to Konotop in March 2022 reported in his first letter that, after his abduction, he was taken to a detention center in Kursk (Russian Federation). He was subsequently transferred to Kamensk-Shakhtinsky in the Rostov Region. A fellow detainee who was later released confirmed that he had been held in the same cell with him; the last specifically named location is Penal Colony No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky (Russian Federation). The family also received information that in June 2025, the man was allegedly taken out for an exchange along with military personnel; however, the military personnel were exchanged, while the civilian was returned to his place of detention.

The route taken by the man detained at Chongar on March 27, 2022, is reconstructed in particular detail. After initial detention and actions by the FSB, he was taken to Simferopol. Until October 2022, he was held in Pretrial Detention Center No. 1. In January 2023, he was transferred to Russia for the first time by freight train; the journey to Ulyanovsk took two weeks and three days. After ten days in Ulyanovsk, he was returned to Simferopol in the same manner. Until May 11, 2023, he was again held in Pretrial Detention Center No. 1, and then, until August 24, in Pretrial Detention Center No. 2. This was followed by a second major transfer: Krasnodar, Vladimir (where he remained until March 20, 2024), Yekaterinburg, and finally, on April 18, 2024, Ulan-Ude in Buryatia.

In the Sumy case, the three detainees were initially taken to the village of Tyotkino in the Kursk region after their phones were searched. One of the men, who was a police officer, was later released, while the main victim and his civilian companion remained in custody. The main victim’s subsequent route is not fully documented; according to the latest information, he was in the Perm Krai, in the Kizel district. This is an example of a route with significant gaps that cannot be filled without additional sources.

An elderly man from the Kyiv region was initially held for several days in the basement of a private home after his detention, then for several days in an open-air pit. He was subsequently transported through Belarus to the Bryansk region of the Russian Federation. The main confirmed long-term location was Pretrial Detention Center No. 2 in Novozybkov, where he was seen by released detainees. At various times, the family also received information about the Tula region and Ufa; however, later another released detainee again reported that the man was in Novozybkov. Therefore, the actual route after the initial stay in Novozybkov remains unclear.

A direct victim from Berdyansk described a shorter but extremely detailed route. On the night of June 26, 2022, she and her husband were taken from their home and transported to a command post set up in the city police building. She remained there for seven days. On July 2, she and the other detainees were transported by truck to Colony No. 77, also known by other numbers and by the name “Yama.” She remained at this facility until September 16, 2022, after which she was released.

The journey of the Crimean Tatar man detained in the Henichesk district began at his own home, from where he was taken to the basement of the former Vocational School No. 17 in Henichesk. He was then transported through the Chongar district to Simferopol, where he was held in Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 and Pretrial Detention Center No. 2. After his sentencing in late 2022–early 2023, he was transferred to the Verkhneuralsk Prison in the Chelyabinsk Region (Russian Federation), where, according to his wife, he was held in solitary confinement for nearly a year. Later, he was held in a penal colony in the Tambov Region (Russian Federation), and since April 2024, he has been in a maximum-security penal colony in Buryatia (Russian Federation).

An elderly woman from the Zaporizhzhia region was detained at her home on July 29, 2025. Initially, she spent about two to three months in a pretrial detention center in the village of Yakymivka. In the fall and winter of 2025, she was held in Donetsk and transported to court hearings in Melitopol. Around January 22, 2026, she was transferred to Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 in Simferopol. Following her sentencing on March 5, 2026, she has been held at Colony No. 1 in Simferopol, according to her granddaughter.

A pensioner from the Luhansk region was first taken to Antratsyt after his arrest and search, and then to Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 in Luhansk. On November 19, 2025, he was transferred to Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 in Rostov-on-Don (Russian Federation). After being sentenced to 19 years in prison on June 25, 2026, the man was transported to an unknown destination.

The man, who was detained on the street in Tokmak on March 20, 2023, was held at the local police station until approximately March 27. After that, he was taken away to an unknown destination. His family has no reliable information about his subsequent whereabouts, the trial, or the criminal case. This is one of the clearest examples in the database of an ongoing disappearance following a brief, known initial phase.

The route taken by this civilian from the Chernihiv region is one of the most controversial. After being detained near Lukashivka, a former border guard who had been released reported seeing him at a prisoner-of-war camp in the Kursk region (Russian Federation), where the victim was assisting the wounded as a medic. At the same time, the ICRC informed his mother that he might be in Crimea. In 2023, several released detainees confirmed that he had been held at Penal Colony No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky (Russian Federation), where he also assisted others as a medic and spent approximately two months in solitary confinement. In September 2024, he was transferred to Pretrial Detention Center No. 3 in the Perm Krai (Russian Federation). As of 2026, this facility is the most specific location of his detention; he was returned there even after a failed attempt to include him in a prisoner exchange.

In the Kupiansk case, two testimonies allow for a much more accurate reconstruction of the first stage than in most other cases. After being detained during a peaceful rally, the victim was held under the control of Russian forces in Kupiansk; witnesses and relatives received information about the command post

and a heating network facility. On March 4, Russian military officials reported that he had allegedly been transferred elsewhere and was “awaiting trial.” For a long period thereafter, there was no official confirmation. Starting around spring 2023, several independent sources reported on Sukhodilsk Penal Colony No. 36 and a possible eight-year sentence. In late March 2025, he was taken from the colony to an unknown destination, and his current whereabouts are unknown.

The young man from the village of Kozarovychi in the Kyiv region was first taken to a warehouse and then to a metal hangar in the village of Dymeri, where a large group of civilians was being held, after being detained at his home on March 2, 2022. Around March 9–10, he and other civilians—including a journalist—were transported via Gostomel to Belarus, and from there to Novozybkov (Russian Federation). He remained in Novozybkov until May 2023. He was then transferred to Penal Colony No. 7 in the village of Pakino (Russian Federation), where, according to available information, he remains in custody.

The 18-year-old’s journey began not in the occupied territory, but at the Volgograd (Russian Federation) airport on December 27, 2023. After a border check, he was handed over to the FSB; subsequently, two consecutive administrative arrests were issued, during which he was held in a special detention center and repeatedly taken to the FSB for interrogations. On January 15, 2024, he was officially detained in connection with a criminal case. After the investigation concluded, he was transferred to a pretrial detention center in Rostov-on-Don (Russian Federation). On July 3, 2024, the Rostov Regional Court sentenced him to 12 years in prison, after which the young man was transferred to Penal Colony No. 10 in the Saratov Region (Russian Federation), where he remains to this day.

On June 28, 2022, armed Russian soldiers took a man from the village of Chervone in the Kherson region from his home. After being initially held in a basement or other unofficial facility in the Beryslav area, he was transported, along with other detainees, to the Russian Federation. His family has only a rough idea that he has been held for many years in one of the detention facilities “beyond Moscow” in a multi-story building. The exact facility and the full route of his transfer remain unknown. For about a year and a half, his family had no reliable confirmation that he was alive.

Two brothers from the Kyiv region share the same initial route but took two different paths afterward. On March 19, 2022, they were detained along with several fellow villagers; their hands were tied, bags were placed over their heads, they were loaded into a covered truck, and taken through Belarus to a pretrial detention center in Novozybkov (Russian Federation). The older brother was transferred from Novozybkov after about four to five months; he went through a transfer process related to Sevastopol and a failed prisoner exchange, then spent about a year and a half at Penal Colony No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky (Russian Federation), and was later moved to a pretrial detention center in the city of Kizel in the Perm Krai (Russian Federation). His younger brother was also transferred separately after about seven months. The most recent location reported for him is Penal Colony No. 1 in Donskoy, Tula Oblast (Russian Federation).

6. DETENTION CONDITIONS

Detailed information about the physical conditions of detention is not available for all twenty primary victims. This is primarily due to the nature of the sources: most of the accounts come from relatives rather than from the detainees themselves. The limited nature of this information is not solely a result of the indirect nature of the accounts. In many cases, relatives are objectively unable to obtain information about detention conditions due to prolonged absence or significant restrictions on contact with the victims, the concealment of their whereabouts, irregular correspondence, and censorship of mail and other forms of communication by Russian authorities and detention facility administrations. Detainees are often unable to report on the violence inflicted upon them, their health status, conditions in their cells, or even their current whereabouts, and families are forced to rely on fragmentary information obtained through released cellmates, lawyers, or other indirect channels. At the same time, for at least eleven individuals, there is concrete evidence of overcrowding, inadequate food, cold, sleep deprivation, sanitary issues, lack of proper medical care, isolation, or systematic violence.

The testimony from Berdiansk provides the most complete picture of the internal organization of this unofficial place of detention. In the command post, a cell designed for two people actually held three, while a single-person cell held four at the same time; some of the women slept on the concrete floor. Torture and interrogations in the basement continued around the clock. Later, at the penal colony, detainees were placed in a disciplinary isolation unit, and the former dining hall was used for interrogations and torture; it contained electric shock devices, rubber truncheons, and a heavy wooden hammer.

Particularly harsh conditions were described regarding PC-15 in Polohy (TOT, Zaporizhzhia Oblast). According to people who were held there, cells measuring approximately three by three meters could hold up to ten people each, and the basement could accommodate about one hundred people at a time. Former ATO participants, business executives, farmers, agribusiness representatives, entrepreneurs, government employees, and other civilians were held there. Witnesses reported severe beatings, sleep and food deprivation, fingernail pulling, and burning of the body. These quantitative details are based on respondents' accounts and require independent verification; however, they are extremely important for determining the scale of the facility's operations.

In Novozybkov (Russian Federation), according to released former detainees, two brothers were kept in the cold, given virtually no food, constantly beaten, and not allowed to sit properly. Food rations are described as critically insufficient: the entire cell might be given only two spoonfuls of porridge, and people effectively survived on bread alone. This combination of starvation, cold, beatings, and a coercive regime must be assessed collectively as inhuman treatment.

In the Perm Krai (Russian Federation), a released prisoner of war reported a regime under which detainees were forced to stand for up to sixteen hours a day

and were not allowed to sit due to constant video surveillance. According to him, people were tortured for about half a year. The main victim was later diagnosed with active tuberculosis; only after that did his diet improve somewhat, and he began to be given butter and milk. The combination of prolonged forced standing, restricted movement, a severe infectious disease, and inadequate nutrition poses a particularly high risk to life.

In an unidentified pretrial detention center in Rostov, the conditions for a young convict were also critical. A cell designed to hold about ten people actually held between twenty and thirty. Due to a lack of space, people took turns sleeping, with some sleeping on mattresses on the concrete floor. Sewage ran nearby, the toilet was not properly separated, the room was located in a basement with virtually no natural light, and inmates were allowed to shower only about once a month.

After this same man was transferred to Colony No. 10 in the Saratov Region (Russian Federation), some conditions improved compared to the pretrial detention center, but the food remained inadequate. According to his brother, the victim was effectively able to eat a normal meal only once a day; he constantly felt hungry and weak and was frequently ill. After prolonged malnutrition, even ordinary home-cooked food caused a severe deterioration in his well-being. During the winter, constant drafts were a problem.

At the prison in Buryatia, where the man sentenced to eight and a half years is being held, a single cell can house up to 80 people. The family reports harsh weather conditions, with outdoor temperatures as low as minus 42 degrees, and the near impossibility of delivering care packages due to the distance. His health condition requires regular medical supervision; however, his family describes inadequate treatment, a lack of necessary medications, and a failure to provide test results.

Medical care is a persistent problem. A man with heart disease is not receiving the necessary treatment for hypertension. Another suffers from severe neurological problems, past strokes, numbness, and other conditions, but receives mostly only the most basic symptomatic care. A young man with tuberculosis remains in detention despite reports of his very serious condition. An elderly woman was diagnosed with dementia while in detention. A man with a long-standing traumatic brain injury and hypertension has had no confirmed access to medical care since his disappearance in 2025.

Deprivation of sleep and rest constitutes a separate form of ill-treatment. At Facility No. 15, detainees reportedly were not allowed to sleep. In Novozybkov (Russian Federation), detainees were not allowed to sit normally. In the Perm Krai (Russian Federation), victims were forced to stand for most of the day. In other detention facilities, interrogations and beatings took place at night. Depending on their duration, intensity, and purpose, such methods may constitute torture or inhuman treatment.

Several facilities used punishment cells or solitary confinement. According to his wife, one Crimean Tatar spent nearly a year in a punishment cell in the

Chelyabinsk Region (Russian Federation), where he was punished, in part, for his appearance and beard. Another civilian spent approximately two months in solitary confinement in the Rostov Region.

Forced labor was documented in the cases of two brothers and several other detainees. People were forced to perform repairs and maintenance work without being provided with decent conditions or fair compensation. Particularly problematic is the combination of such labor with beatings, threats, starvation, and complete dependence on the administration.

Communication with the outside world is also systematically restricted in all documented cases. Letters are censored, arrive with delays of several months, or do not arrive at all. In one case, a mother did not receive a letter written in September until January. In many letters, detainees write only that “everything is fine.” Therefore, the mere presence of this phrase cannot be used as an indicator of adequate conditions or the absence of torture.

The geographical remoteness of detention facilities is a factor in itself that contributes to isolation. Buryatia, the Saratov Region, the Perm Krai, Mordovia, the Vladimir Region, the Chelyabinsk Region, and other remote territories of the Russian Federation significantly complicate the delivery of medication and contact with family and attorneys. Some families have not seen their loved ones for years and receive information only through third parties.

7. LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AND VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL

Information regarding criminal cases or legal proceedings is available for at least eight of the twenty primary victims. In seven cases, there is information about a guilty verdict, although one of these verdicts has not been confirmed by the family with an official document. Six sufficiently specific prison terms total 75 years and 6 months.

The longest specifically established sentence in the dataset is 20 years of imprisonment. A man detained back in 2018 in Donetsk was initially tried in the occupied territory of Ukraine; the main trial then took place in Rostov-on-Don (Russian Federation). The final hearing on December 24, 2024, resulted in a 20-year sentence; the appeal did not change the outcome. According to his wife, the court-appointed attorney in Donetsk did not, in fact, provide a substantive defense.

The second-longest sentence—19 years—was handed down to a retiree from the Luhansk region. He was charged under a range of articles, including “treason” and crimes related to explosives and “terrorist” activities. Almost immediately after the verdict, the man was transferred to another facility, and his family lost track of his current whereabouts.

On March 5, 2026, an elderly woman from the Zaporizhzhia region was sentenced

to 11 years under Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (“treason”). According to her granddaughter, the family was not allowed into the courtroom, and the defense attorney had limited influence. The actual pretext for the prosecution is said to be a transfer of 500 hryvnias in support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

On July 3, 2024, the Rostov Regional Court sentenced a young man detained in Volgograd to 12 years in prison and an additional year of restricted freedom following his release. The trial was held behind closed doors due to classified materials. The prosecution relied on phone records and testimony from people in his circle regarding his anti-war views and charitable donations. Particularly problematic is the fact that the criminal detention was preceded by two administrative arrests, which effectively ensured that the individual remained under the control of state authorities continuously until the formal opening of the criminal case.

The man, who was detained in Chongar on October 25, 2022, was sentenced to eight years and six months under Part 2 of Article 208 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (“participation in an illegal armed group”). An appeal on December 6, 2022, upheld the sentence. When determining the pretrial measure, the court rejected the defense’s arguments regarding the defendant’s health, while the prosecution relied, in particular, on closed-door witness testimony. In May 2023, a cassation review took place, and the sentence remained unchanged.

On August 9, 2022, another Crimean Tatar was sentenced to five years in a strict-regime penal colony on charges related to participation in a civic group and the blockade of Crimea. According to his wife, the defense attorney was restricted from taking notes during meetings, and the defense either refused to file an appeal or was forced to do so due to pressure from the FSB.

In the 2025 Crimean case, a final verdict had not yet been handed down at the time of documentation. On May 15, 2026, the court ordered two months of pretrial detention, and the lawyer established direct contact with the family for the first time. The charge relates to “treason,” and the preliminary confession, according to the respondent, may have been obtained under psychological pressure and fear of violence.

In the Kupiansk case, several sources reported an eight-year sentence on a charge described as “terrorism” or a threat to the life of a Russian soldier. However, the family has received no official confirmation of either the sentence itself or the specific charge.

Common procedural issues include closed hearings, lack of family access, the use of classified materials or closed-door witnesses, the purely formal nature of court-appointed defense counsel, the inability to independently verify evidence, the extraction of confessions following periods of incommunicado detention or violence, coercion to sign documents desired by the investigation, and the lack of proper notification regarding transfers following sentencing.

In several cases, it is important to emphasize separately that evidence obtained through the use of violence is inadmissible. One young man was beaten and threatened while being forced to sign a false confession. Another Crimean victim, according to his daughter, confessed out of fear of torture. In Berdyansk, the release of a direct victim was accompanied by coercion to write a statement claiming that no violence had been used against her. Such documents cannot be evaluated in isolation from the circumstances of the person's complete dependence on their detainers.

From the perspective of international humanitarian law, the intentional deprivation of a protected person's right to a fair and proper trial may, if all necessary elements are present, constitute a war crime. The application of the occupying state's criminal law to Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territory—including those with pro-Ukrainian views, those who provide financial support to Ukraine, those who refuse to accept Russian documents, and those who previously served Ukraine—requires particular scrutiny.

8. INFORMATION ON OTHER VICTIMS AND THE BROADER CONTEXT

Beyond the twenty primary victims, the testimonies contain an extremely substantial body of secondary evidence. Conservatively speaking, there are more than fifty other individuals—identified by name or described in sufficient detail—who were detained, held together with the main victims, subjected to beatings or torture, criminally prosecuted, disappeared, released, or killed. It is impossible to determine the exact number, as some people are mentioned without names, in groups, by aliases, or only by approximate characteristics, and potential duplication across different accounts cannot always be ruled out.

The largest body of information about other victims comes from the firsthand testimony of a woman from Berdiansk. She describes other detained women and men, married couples, former military personnel, civilian activists, and people who were detained because of their relatives. One 23-year-old woman, according to her personal observations, was tortured with electric shocks and batons for about one and a half to two hours; her pants were removed. Another man, a former member of "Azov," was tortured by the FSB for over an hour; the witness also reports that he had been subjected to violence in 2014.

The same testimony allows us to reconstruct the scale of transfers between the commandant's office and the penal colony. One day, a group of women and men was led out of the basement and loaded onto military transport; according to the victim, the penal colony administration did not even expect such a large number of arrivals. She also describes the case of a woman who was wrongfully detained and held for 35 days before it was determined that the security forces were actually looking for someone else.

In the Polohiv case, the broader context is particularly severe. According to reports from former detainees, PC-15 could hold about 100 people at a time.

In addition to the primary victim, the interviewee mentions a man who himself suffered severe beatings and became a source of information about her father's torture, as well as another pro-Ukrainian businessman who, about half a year later, was also tortured and killed; his body was found in a forest strip. The testimony also includes broader accounts from local residents regarding mass graves.

In the case of the two brothers, at least three other villagers were detained along with them, as well as other members of the group. Two young men from this group, according to their mother, were released during one of the prisoner exchanges in June 2026. Their testimony may be of particular importance in establishing the circumstances of the initial transport and the conditions of detention in Novozybkov (Russian Federation).

In the case of a young man from the village of Kozarovychi in the Kyiv region, there are reports of a large group of civilians who were held in warehouses and hangars, and later some of whom were transported via Belarus to Russia. Among them were a journalist and other civilians. One of the men, who later was held with the main victim in Pakino (Vladimir Oblast, Russian Federation), was also abducted along with others simply on his way home from work.

In the Rostov pretrial detention center, the young convict was held among a significant number of Ukrainian citizens. The testimony contains information about other Ukrainian civilians sentenced to long prison terms, including a clergyman and a resident of the occupied Kherson region. This underscores the importance of analyzing not only individual cases but also specific institutions as potential hubs for the concentration of unlawfully persecuted Ukrainian citizens.

In the Sumy case, two other men were detained along with the primary victim. One of them, a police officer, was later released, while the other civilian remained in custody. The case of the man from Tokmak mentions other civilians who were beaten while in custody, including a young man who was detained for his pro-Ukrainian stance.

A separate secondary victim is the respondent in one of the two Kupiansk testimonies. After he witnessed the arrest of the primary victim and was searching for him, on March 7, 2022, Russian military personnel also briefly detained him, tied his hands, placed a bag over his head, and interrogated him about photographs of Russian military equipment and possible resistance. This episode is not included in the main count of twenty victims, as the structure of the dataset identifies another person as the primary victim in this testimony; however, it is independently relevant to the investigation of the crimes committed against him.

In the Kherson case, the wife of the primary victim herself suffered physical abuse during her husband's detention. In addition, other civilians and former ATO participants were taken away along with him. The family received information

that one young man was later left near a settlement in critical condition and died.

The body of secondary accounts is important not only for increasing the number of known victims. It makes it possible to identify potential witnesses, compare descriptions of specific places of detention, reconstruct the staff and conditions, verify routes of movement, and identify recurring practices. Particularly important for further investigation are individuals who have already been released and were directly held with the main victims in the same cells or basements.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence collected in July 2026 documents twenty unique primary victims across nineteen primary incidents of detention. It covers the period from 2018 to 2025, with 65% of the primary victims having been detained in 2022. As of the time of documentation, only one primary victim had been released, one man had died, and eighteen remained in detention or had an unknown current whereabouts.

The overwhelming majority of primary victims are men—90%—while 80% of respondents are women. This reflects a dual gender effect: men constitute the main group of detainees, while women have for years borne the primary burden of searching for them, communicating with authorities, mapping out routes, and maintaining contact.

The profile of those affected confirms that persecution is not limited to active-duty military personnel or individuals directly participating in combat operations. None of the twenty were described by respondents as active-duty members of the regular Armed Forces of Ukraine at the time of their initial detention. The group includes ordinary workers, retirees, entrepreneurs, volunteers, young civilians, former military personnel, and people with no current connection to the armed forces.

Persecution based on actual or alleged disloyalty to the Russian Federation and the occupation administration is particularly evident. Cell phones, social media, photographs of Russian military equipment, charitable donations, Ukrainian documents, participation in a peaceful rally, refusal to accept a Russian passport, and past military service in Ukraine were used as risk indicators. In at least seven cases, digital information played a direct role in the persecution.

Concealing one’s whereabouts is one of the most persistent patterns. At least 75% of the victims experienced a period during which their families did not know their place of detention, received no confirmation, or were met with outright denials of their detention. Such practices sharply increase the risk of torture, as they eliminate even formal external oversight and access to a lawyer.

Transfer is not a secondary but a structural element of detention. 85% of victims were transferred through two or more places of detention or transit, and at least 65% were forcibly taken from the occupied territory of Ukraine to the Russian Federation. These routes link unofficial basements, command posts, occupation police stations, pretrial detention centers, and penal colonies in Ukraine and Russia into a single, continuous chain.

Torture and ill-treatment are among the central categories in the dataset. At least 40% of the primary victims show direct or sufficiently specific signs of torture or particularly severe physical violence; no fewer than half have individualized accounts of physical violence. Electric shocks, severe beatings,

threats of mutilation and death, forced standing, starvation, sleep deprivation, forced nudity, and psychological pressure recur across geographically diverse cases.

At least three major cases contain indications of sexualized violence, which require special documentation from the perspective of the Specialized Commission on Torture (SCT). It is particularly significant that two of these cases involve men. A separate secondary case involving a woman also contains a description of forced partial undressing during electric shock torture.

The death of a man following his detention at PC-15 in Polohy is one of the most serious incidents in the dataset and requires a priority investigation. The available information points not only to severe violence against him but also to possible systematic torture of other individuals at the same facility, other deaths, and problems with the burial and subsequent identification of the bodies.

Court proceedings do not guarantee the legality of detention; in some cases, they constitute the next stage of persecution. Eight victims have gone through criminal or civil proceedings; at least seven have been reported to have received convictions. The combined sentences of six individuals already total 75 years and 6 months. Closed trials, classified materials, restrictions on legal representation, the use of confessions obtained through coercion, and the criminalization of pro-Ukrainian actions form a distinct and persistent pattern.

Provided that the individual status of the victims, the link to the armed conflict, and other necessary elements are established, the documented acts may constitute war crimes of unlawful detention, torture and inhuman treatment, unlawful transfer or deportation, and the intentional denial of the right to a fair and due trial; and in the case of the death in Polohy—possible intentional homicide or death resulting from torture. Some incidents require further assessment regarding conflict-related sexual violence.

At the same time, the body of testimony contains significant evidence potentially relevant to a broader analysis of crimes against humanity, including imprisonment, torture, enforced disappearances, and persecution on political, national, or other discriminatory grounds. A final conclusion regarding crimes against humanity requires proof of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population and other contextual elements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results of the analysis of testimony from witnesses and individuals unlawfully deprived of their liberty as a result of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as the identified recurring patterns of violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law, it is advisable to take the following measures:

1. To law enforcement agencies:

a) Ensure the continuous and systematic documentation of instances of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty, including the circumstances of detention, places and conditions of detention, the routes taken by detainees, the use of torture and ill-treatment, as well as related judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings. Such documentation must be carried out in accordance with the standards of admissibility of evidence in national and international criminal proceedings.

b) integrate the collected testimony into the work of Ukraine's pre-trial investigation authorities and use it to classify the relevant acts as war crimes and, where the necessary elements are present, crimes against humanity, in particular enforced disappearances, unlawful detention, torture, and persecution of the civilian population.

c) regularly analyze victims' testimonies as a tool for identifying new trends, updating the typology of violations, and assessing the evolution of practices of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty in the context of a protracted armed conflict.

d) Identify the staging and forced displacement of civilians—in particular, deportation to the territory of the Russian Federation—as separate instances of international crimes, with the aim of ensuring proper criminal law assessment and enhancing the effectiveness of investigations. Such actions must be documented separately from the initial unlawful detention and must include establishing the role of escort units, the administrations of places of detention, and so-called "judicial" bodies in the temporarily occupied territories. The relevant facts should serve as the basis for opening separate criminal proceedings under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, taking into account the cumulative nature of the violations of international humanitarian law.

e) Pay special attention to conducting forensic medical and forensic psychiatric examinations in accordance with the UN Istanbul Protocol. This refers, in particular, to documenting the consequences of torture and ill-treatment, including injuries from electric shocks, systematic beatings, as well as psychological disorders, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder.

f) Establish a centralized database of such expert opinions, which would

ensure the consistency of the evidence base, prevent the re-traumatization of victims, and help identify typical patterns of violence.

g) Include in the evidence strategy a systematic approach to collecting and documenting evidence related to the registration of detainees. This includes correspondence and confirmations from the International Committee of the Red Cross, registration data from places of detention, information on “transfer” and individual identifiers from the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation, as well as extracts from so-called “personal accounts” or electronic record-keeping systems. Separately, the practice of “appointed” or occupation-controlled lawyers refusing to transfer case materials to families or representatives of victims should be documented as an element of obstructing the right to defense and access to information.

h) Establish a separate procedural approach for classifying the activities of the so-called “courts” in the temporarily occupied territories. The unlawful detention of civilians, the handing down of unlawful sentences, and the subsequent transfer of detainees beyond the occupied territory to the Russian Federation should be documented as separate complex crimes encompassing the categories of unlawful deprivation of liberty, denial of the right to a fair trial, and deportation of the civilian population.

2. To executive authorities:

a) Ensure that the status of persons who have been unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty is properly recognized, including access to social, legal, and psychological protection. The procedures for such recognition must be people-centered, must not place an excessive burden of proof on the victims, and must take into account the specific nature of crimes committed under occupation.

b) strengthen international cooperation to exchange information regarding the locations where civilian hostages are being held, the conditions of their detention, and those responsible, and use the collected evidence in international mechanisms, particularly within the framework of the International Criminal Court (ICC), universal jurisdiction, and sanctions regimes.

c) Develop specialized treatment and rehabilitation programs for individuals released from places of unlawful detention. Such programs should include treatment for chronic diseases and complications, particularly cardiovascular and renal pathologies, the consequences of prolonged starvation (anorexia, severe weight loss), as well as dental complications.

d) Provide long-term psychosocial support to the families of individuals who are being held incommunicado or are considered missing.

e) Strengthen technical cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross to verify the routes of movement and current status of detainees.

3. To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine:

a) Advocate for the ICRC's access to specific pretrial detention centers and penal colonies on the territory of the Russian Federation where, according to documented evidence, civilians who have been unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty are being held. This includes, among others, facilities in Krasnodar, Volgograd, Kazan, Irkutsk, the Republic of Buryatia, the Saratov Oblast, and the Republic of Mordovia.

b) systematically raise the issue of documented routes of deportation and detention of civilians in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic forums to advocate for their release.

4. To international institutions and human rights organizations:

a) Use the documented routes of movement, conditions of detention, classifications under articles of the Russian Federation's criminal code, and described practices regarding the treatment of detainees to prepare targeted submissions to the International Criminal Court and the UN special procedures on torture and enforced disappearances.

b) Use the documented routes of transfer, conditions of detention, classifications under articles of the Russian Federation's criminal code, and the described practices regarding the treatment of detainees to initiate personal and sectoral sanctions regimes against the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation and its associated "judicial" and administrative bodies.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND CUMULATIVE INDICATORS

Since 2022, documenters from the NGO “Association of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners” have identified and interviewed more than 735 people—witnesses and victims of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and other international crimes against the civilian population. Of these, 20 individuals were identified and documented during a documentation effort in July 2026. At the same time, the total number of individuals identified by the Association through documentation, the use of OSINT, and cooperation with human rights actors exceeds 1,000 people who have been unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty. The documented violations include, first and foremost, unlawful deprivation of personal liberty, as well as shelling of civilian infrastructure, appropriation of private property by the occupying forces, and other related crimes.

The Documentation Department and the Research and Analytics Department of the NGO “Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin” carried out the documentation of war crimes and prepared this analytical review.



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