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 August 2026 was prepared based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of twenty testimonies concerning the unlawful deprivation of personal liberty of civilians in the context of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine. The August set of testimonies covers both short-term episodes of forced detention and long-term imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel treatment, the deportation of civilians to the Russian Federation, detention in unofficial places of confinement, pretrial detention centers and penal colonies, forced labor, persecution for pro-Ukrainian views, prior military or law enforcement service, financial support for Ukraine, refusal to integrate into the Russian occupation system, as well as criminal and quasi-judicial proceedings, which in some cases resulted in lengthy prison sentences.

The primary unit of quantitative analysis consists of twenty main victims, one from each testimony. Fifteen of the twenty victims are men, accounting for 75%, and five are women, or 25%. By year of primary detention, the highest concentration of cases occurred in 2022: nine of the twenty victims, or 45%, were detained during the first year of the full-scale invasion. Three, or 15%, were detained in 2023; four, or 20%, in 2024; two, or 10%, in 2025; and one person, or 5%, in 2026. Another major victim was detained in Donetsk in 2020, that is, before the start of the full-scale phase of the war.

Geographically, the largest group comes from the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of Zaporizhzhia Oblast—six out of twenty major victims, or 30%. Four individuals each, or 20% each, were initially detained in the Kherson and Kharkiv regions. Three cases, or 15%, occurred in the Kyiv region; two, or 10%, in the Donetsk region; and one, or 5%, in the Luhansk region. In twelve out of twenty cases—that is, in 60% of the incidents—the primary detention took place directly in the victim's home or on the property. The other incidents occurred on the street, on the road, in a vehicle, near a checkpoint, or while attempting to leave the occupied territory. The predominance of detentions directly in the victims' homes indicates a significant proportion of targeted operations, in which the occupying forces already knew exactly who they were looking for, rather than merely the accidental discovery of "disloyal" individuals during checks. According to a number of testimonies, these incidents were preceded by "tips," searches for former ATO participants, phone checks, house searches, or prior contact with the occupying authorities.

As of the time of documentation in August 2026, six of the twenty main victims—or 30 percent—had been released and were no longer in detention. Two of them returned to Ukraine through official exchange procedures; the others were released by the occupying authorities, managed to free themselves from unlawful detention, or returned to territory controlled by Ukraine by other means. Fourteen individuals—that is, 70%—remained in places of detention, or their fate following their detention remained unknown. For at least six of these fourteen, their current whereabouts at the

time of documentation were unknown, contradictory, or lacked sufficient official confirmation.

One of the most consistent characteristics of the August body of evidence is the concealment of the detainees' fate and whereabouts. In at least seventeen of the twenty main cases—that is, 85%—there was a significant period during which the family did not know the place of detention, received no official confirmation, faced denials of the detention, or could obtain information only from former fellow detainees, acquaintances, lawyers, or through unofficial channels. The duration of such uncertainty ranges from several weeks to months and years.

Equally telling is the frequency with which civilians are moved between different places of detention. At least fourteen of the twenty main victims, or 70%, passed through two or more known or partially identified places of detention or transit points. At least eleven people, or 55% of all incidents, were forcibly transferred to the Russian Federation after being detained on Ukrainian territory. However, this figure does not include routes taken by released individuals who left on their own through the Russian Federation and Belarus, since such trips—despite the limited choice of routes under occupation—did not constitute transfers within the context of deprivation of liberty. Among the forced routes within the Russian Federation are the Belgorod, Bryansk, Kursk, Rostov, Vladimir, and Tula regions, the Chechen Republic, the Republic of Tuva, as well as reports of further transfers to Mordovia and Tomsk.

Direct or sufficiently specific information regarding beatings, torture, or other physical abuse is available for at least eleven of the twenty primary victims, or 55 percent. This figure should be considered the minimum confirmed level, rather than an estimate of the actual prevalence of violence, since only four testimonies were provided directly by the primary victims. The most detailed accounts include torture by electric shock, group beatings lasting many hours, blows with a baseball bat, rifle butts, and batons, threats of maiming and murder, waterboarding, the application of hot metal to the feet, prolonged forced standing, keeping bound and naked men outdoors and in water, resulting in frostbite, deprivation of adequate food and water, isolation, coercion to confess, and psychological pressure.

A distinctive feature of the August wave is the combination of physical violence with prolonged detention conditions, which in themselves cause a severe deterioration in health. These include overcrowded cells, being forced to stand for long periods from morning to night, inadequate food, restricted access to water, poor sanitation, lack of proper medical care, censorship of correspondence, denial of telephone access, irregular or unavailable outdoor exercise, and the use of solitary confinement.

The August testimonies do not contain sufficient specific information to establish confirmed cases of rape or other forms of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). At the same time, in one case, a group of civilian men was held bound in the open air, stripped naked, kept in water, and forced to wear

wet shoes in cold conditions. Forced nudity under conditions of complete control, humiliation, and physical violence may be considered a form of CSAC. Information regarding formalized criminal prosecution or an officially communicated "suspicion" is available in at least eight of the twenty main cases, or 40 percent. Court proceedings are known to have taken place in at least seven cases. In three cases, the testimonies explicitly mention prison sentences: eleven years for "espionage," eight years and six months for "aiding terrorist activities," and ten years for "espionage." The other three victims face charges or criminal prosecution for "treason." In one case, a woman was exempted from criminal liability following prosecution for pro-Ukrainian statements and publications and was subjected to compulsory psychiatric treatment.

Digital data is one of the most consistent triggers for persecution. In at least seven of the twenty main cases—or 35 percent—there are direct references to cell phones, photographs, social media, banking apps, financial transfers, or other digital content that was used during detention, interrogation, or criminal prosecution. These include photos from previous military service, videos of Russian soldiers, pro-Ukrainian posts and likes, critical comments about the Russian army, contacts in the phone, and charitable donations in support of Ukraine. Particularly telling is the case of a 19-year-old student sentenced to eight years and six months in prison for allegedly transferring 50 hryvnias to an account that the Russian side linked to the "Azov" regiment.

Among the notable cases from the August wave, the detention of five civilian men in the Kyiv region in March 2022 also stands out. The Russian military released one of them and, according to testimony, ordered him to convey a demand to the head of the Makariv community to surrender, promising to release the rest of the detainees if he complied. Provided the nature of this demand is confirmed and the detention of the other individuals is linked to coercing a third party into a specific course of action, this incident could be classified as the war crime of hostage-taking. The subsequent conditions of detention for this group were particularly harsh: the men were held outdoors, stripped, bound, and kept in water; one of them developed gangrene, resulting in the amputation of part of one leg and the removal of the heel and toes on the other.

Taken together, the body of evidence from August reveals a pattern of interconnected practices, rather than isolated incidents of detention. This sequence includes the preliminary identification of individuals based on denunciations, digital data, professional history, or open political views; forcible apprehension or brief "interrogation" without procedural safeguards; the seizure of communication devices, documents, and property; incommunicado detention and concealment of whereabouts; torture or other cruel treatment; transfers between unofficial basements, military police stations, pretrial detention centers, and penal colonies; deportation to the Russian Federation; and, in some cases, the subsequent formalization of the initially unlawful detention through Russian criminal cases, forced confessions, and convictions.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This analytical review is based on twenty testimonies from victims interviewed during the documentation of war crimes in August 2026. The primary unit of quantitative analysis is defined as one primary victim in each of the twenty testimonies. Individuals detained alongside them, cellmates, other relatives, victims reported by released detainees, and other identified individuals are not included in this figure and are analyzed separately in the section on the broader context.

The structure of the sources is of fundamental importance for interpreting the results. Four of the twenty testimonies—or 20%—were provided directly by the primary victims. The remaining sixteen—or 80%—come from third parties: fifteen from family members, and one from a friend and colleague of an illegally detained employee of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. As a result, the body of testimonies provides a much more comprehensive account of the circumstances of the disappearances, the search efforts, communication with government agencies, lawyers, and international organizations, as well as information on transfers, than it does of daily conditions inside the cells or specific methods of violence. The absence of information in the testimony regarding torture, sexual violence, food, or medical care cannot, accordingly, be considered proof that such violations did not occur.

For each primary victim, thematic coding was performed based on gender, approximate age at the time of detention, professional and social profile, prior military or law enforcement service (if any), health status, year and location of initial detention, circumstances of the abduction, information about searches and seized property, numerical data, possible motives for persecution, the duration of hiding one's whereabouts, all known stages of relocation, the fact of being taken to the Russian Federation, information on physical and psychological violence, potential signs of torture or ill-treatment, food, access to water, sanitation, medical care, access to correspondence, visits, and a lawyer, the use of forced labor, criminal or administrative proceedings, convictions, and current status.

Quantitative indicators are calculated as the minimum confirmed number of cases. One case in the dataset corresponds to five percent. If the evidence does not allow for a definitive determination of a specific indicator, the case is not included in the corresponding quantitative indicator. Therefore, for example, the figures for torture, forced displacement, or other forms of persecution may be lower than the actual scale of these practices.
The age of the victims was estimated by comparing their year of birth with the year of their initial detention. The estimated age range of the primary victims is 19 to 74 years, and the average age is approximately 47.4 years. Three of the twenty victims, or 15 percent, were 60 years of age or older at the time of their initial detention.

The legal assessment is preliminary and analytical in nature. This review identifies categories of acts that may be relevant to international humanitarian

law and international criminal law, but does not replace an individual criminal investigation. For a definitive classification, it is necessary to establish the status of the specific victim and the perpetrators, the connection between the act and the armed conflict, the context of the occupation, the form of intent, the purpose of the violence, and other elements of the relevant criminal offense. This is precisely why the phrases "may constitute," "exhibits signs of," "requires separate verification," and "provided that the relevant contextual elements are established" are used.

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, hostage-taking, 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 August body of evidence is characterized by the simultaneous presence of three different patterns of unlawful deprivation of liberty. The first involves short-term or repeated informal detention without criminal proceedings, as in the cases of a woman from Orlyanskyi, who was held under guard in her own home for about four hours and beaten during interrogation, and a man from the Vasylivskyi district, who was repeatedly taken away "for preventive measures," held in unknown basements, and beaten. The second involves the de facto detention of civilians for many years without any charges, trial, or sentence, most clearly illustrated by the stories of two brothers from the Kharkiv region and several civilians from the Kyiv region. The third pattern involves the gradual formalization of initially informal detention through administrative or criminal proceedings, charges under Russian law, and lengthy sentences.

In terms of the nature of the detention sites, residences and private properties predominate. In twelve of the twenty main cases, the individuals were taken from their homes or directly from their yards. This applies, in particular, to a female doctor from Melitopol, a retiree and a former law enforcement officer from Kozacha Lopana, a man from Polohy, a student from Bilovodsk, a former ATO participant from Petropavlivka, an elderly woman from Berdiansk, brothers from the village of Vesele, a Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant employee, an elderly man from Hlyboky, a businesswoman from Kakhovka, and a tractor driver from the Kupiansk district.In some of these cases, the abductors arrived in large groups, used vehicles without license plates or wore masks, conducted searches, and immediately confiscated phones, documents, and electronic devices.

The rest of the detentions took place in public spaces. An 18-year-old man from the Kherson region was abducted on the road between Malokakhovka and Tavriysk; a man from Lyubymivka was taken from his car after his documents and phone were checked; a civilian painter from Dymer—on the street on his way home; a group of five men—during a check at a checkpoint or headquarters in the village of Khocheva; and men from a construction crew—while walking out of the occupied territory near Makarov. This geographical pattern indicates a combination of targeted persecution and the incidental identification of individuals during checks of documents and digital devices.

The testimonies reveal the regular use of "informants" or local information networks. In Svitlodarsk, shortly before a civilian man was detained, an acquaintance of the family—whose brother served in the so-called "DPR"—published his name and home address in a local Telegram chat amid messages about the need to "clean out" people who do not support Russia. According to one of them, the brothers from the village of Vesele were detained following a tip-off regarding their past participation in the ATO. In Bilovodsk, a family suspects that the persecution of a 19-year-old student was triggered by a tip-off from an acquaintance of his father regarding alleged funding of "Azov." In

Berdiansk, the family of an elderly woman also suspected that the previous searches began after a tip-off regarding her casual pro-Ukrainian remarks.

Another recurring element is the seizure or de facto appropriation of property. In various cases, phones, laptops, computers, cameras, routers, documents, bank and other digital data, money, and valuables were taken. A man from Lyubymivka had his car taken along with him; according to locals, Russian military personnel later used that car. Another man's car also ended up in the hands of military personnel after his detention and, according to his family, was later sold to a third party. During a search, documents, laptops, money, and valuables were taken from two brothers from the Kharkiv region. Such incidents must be documented separately from the deprivation of liberty itself, as depending on the method and purpose of the seizure of property, they may constitute separate violations of international humanitarian law.

As of the time of documentation, six of the main victims had been released. The two documented returns via an official exchange involved a seriously ill man from Kozacha Lopana, who was returned on June 5, 2026, and one of the two brothers from the Kharkiv region, who was released on October 2, 2025, after approximately three and a half years in captivity. At the same time, release did not mean an end to the consequences of the violation. The first victim's severe cancer had progressed, and in the other case, the released man from Polohy reported lasting physical injuries, housing problems, financial insecurity, and social isolation after his return.

2. GEOGRAPHY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTIONS

The Zaporizhzhia region is represented by six main victims and constitutes the largest regional cluster in the August body of testimony. The cases cover Melitopol, Orlyanske, Mala Bilozerka, Polohy, Berdiansk, and Energodar. Despite their geographical proximity, the nature of the persecution varies significantly: from brief, violent interrogations in one's own home to months-long detention, torture, criminal prosecution for "treason," and the disappearance of an employee of a strategic facility.

In Melitopol, a family doctor was detained at home following previous incidents of pressure due to her openly pro-Ukrainian stance and her resistance to forced Russian passportization. In the village of Orlyanske in the Vasylivka district, a woman was interrogated and beaten in her own home because of her husband—a former combatant—and her son, who served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. A man from Mala Bilozerka describes a recurring pattern of nighttime detentions, detention in basements, and beatings "as a preventive measure."

The Pologiv case illustrates the use of unofficial basements as the first stage of unlawful detention. A man was taken from his apartment at night after his door was broken down; all his documents were seized, and his head was covered with clothing. In Berdiansk, the persecution of a 73-year-old pensioner was gradual. In March 2025, she was taken in for questioning for the first time and

declared “barred from leaving”; in September, another search took place, and while inspecting her phones, occupation authorities discovered money transfers to the Ukrainian Armed Forces via “Privat24” and pro-Ukrainian comments on Facebook. Her final arrest took place on March 31, 2026.

The Energodar case involves an employee of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant who was taken from his home by FSB agents on approximately December 14, 2024. He had serious health issues, including a history of stroke and complications from a perforated ulcer; he remained in Energodar because he needed to care for his paralyzed father and refused to sign a contract with “Rosatom.” Around the same time, another employee of the same facility was detained. In January 2025, it became known that a court hearing had taken place and the charge had been reclassified as “treason.” According to the latest information in the testimony, the victim was being held in the Melitopol pretrial detention center and was scheduled to be transferred to Mariupol.

The Kherson region is represented by four different patterns of persecution. An 18-year-old civilian from the Kakhovka district disappeared on the road while traveling to visit his elderly relatives; his story later escalated into a criminal case involving “espionage.” A man from Lyubymivka was detained after his phone was searched in his own car; his fate remains unknown. Russian military personnel specifically tracked down a former ATO participant from Petropavlivka at his place of residence, having already obtained information about documents and awards he had hidden. A businesswoman from Kakhovka, who had participated in pro-Ukrainian rallies and refused to accept a Russian passport, was taken from her apartment in the presence of her husband and minor son; authorities subsequently denied the detention for months.

The Kharkiv group also includes four main victims. A former law enforcement officer from Kozacha Lopana was specifically identified by a group of approximately fifteen soldiers; the occupiers already had information about his former work in the police and his son’s work in law enforcement, and after he refused to cooperate, they subjected him to torture. One of a pair of twin brothers from the village of Vesele was detained along with his brother because of old photographs from his military service. An elderly man from Hlyboky was taken away because of his pro-Ukrainian stance and disloyalty to the occupying authorities; during his arrest, two of his ribs were broken. A tractor driver from the Kupianskyi district was abducted from his home in March 2023, and his exact fate remains unknown.

The Kyiv cluster of three main cases shares a common feature—the detention of civilians without prior pursuit during the first weeks of the occupation. In Dymer, a civilian painter was seized on the street on February 26, 2022, and held on the premises of the “Viknaland” enterprise. In the village of Khocheva on March 19, five men were detained simultaneously following a check at a Russian checkpoint. Another group of five civilians, who were attempting to leave the occupied territory on foot in the direction of Makarov, were detained on March 3 by armed soldiers, who tied their hands and took them away. It was this last group that subsequently endured particularly harsh conditions

while being held outdoors.

The Donetsk case consists of two separate incidents. A woman from Donetsk was detained as early as October 19, 2020, by representatives of the so-called "DPR MGB" after she filmed Russian soldiers and openly expressed pro-Ukrainian views. Another man disappeared in Svitlodarsk in February 2023 after his name and address were published in a local Telegram chat as part of calls to identify disloyal individuals. He was taken from his apartment with almost no clothes on, and since then, his family has had no reliable information about his fate.

The only case in Luhansk involves a 19-year-old student from Bilovodsk. During a nighttime search, his classmate was detained along with him, digital devices were seized, and once at the military police station, the victim was forced to record a video confession. Subsequent criminal proceedings were based on a transfer of 50 hryvnias through a Ukrainian bank.

3. PROFILE OF VICTIMS

The gender composition of the August dataset is less homogeneous than in many samples of unlawfully detained civilians, but men still constitute the majority: fifteen out of twenty primary victims, or 75%. Five victims, or 25%, are women. In contrast, the opposite trend is observed among the respondents themselves: fifteen out of twenty testimonies, or 75%, were provided by women. These are predominantly wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, granddaughters, and other female relatives of the unlawfully detained men. Thus, the dataset simultaneously demonstrates the predominance of men among the immediate victims and the disproportionate burden placed on women to undertake the long-term tasks of searching for information and communicating with government agencies, lawyers, international organizations, and released fellow detainees.

The estimated average age of the primary victims at the time of detention was 47.4 years. The youngest was approximately 19 years old, and the oldest victim was about 74 years old. Three out of twenty, or 15%, were approximately 60 years old or older. At the same time, the data set covers all major age groups of the adult civilian population: young students, people in their 30s and 40s, middle-aged individuals, and retirees.

None of the twenty main victims was described in the testimonies as an active-duty member of the Armed Forces of Ukraine at the time of their initial detention. At least six, or 30 percent, had prior military or law enforcement experience. Among them were a former police lieutenant colonel, two former ATO participants, individuals who had previously served in the military on a conscript or contract basis, as well as men with experience serving in the Soviet armed forces. In several cases, past military service became a direct risk factor years after it had ended. This is particularly evident in the case of a former ATO participant from Petropavlivka and the brothers from the village of Vesele.

The victims do not constitute a homogeneous group. Among them are a family doctor, an entrepreneur, and a former teacher; an employee of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant; a tractor operator; a long-haul truck driver; a furniture painter; construction workers; general laborers; a sawmill worker; a polymer plant worker; a boiler room operator; retirees; a student; and unemployed individuals. This is fundamentally important for understanding the nature of the persecution: the body of evidence itself does not support the assumption that the unlawful detentions were directed solely against people with military experience.

Instead, a common factor in a significant number of cases is the perception that the individual is disloyal to the occupying authorities. This perception was formed based on pro-Ukrainian statements, participation in rallies, prior military service, refusal to cooperate, refusal to obtain a Russian passport or sign a contract with Rosatom, donations to Ukrainian organizations, digital content, family ties to Ukrainian law enforcement officers or military personnel, or acts of denunciation. In a number of cases, the specific motive remains unknown, and the family's assumptions are clearly distinct from the established facts.

At least eight of the twenty main victims—that is, no fewer than 40 percent—had significant chronic illnesses, disabilities, or other medical vulnerabilities prior to their detention. These included thyroid problems, the aftereffects of a concussion, vision impairments and knee problems, chronic sinusitis, gastrointestinal diseases, a history of stroke and a perforated ulcer, Group III disability and epilepsy, as well as significant hearing loss requiring the use of a hearing aid.

In several cases, medical vulnerabilities have worsened as a result of detention. A man from Kozacha Lopana became seriously ill in a Russian pretrial detention center, and the lack of proper treatment for his cancer led to critical exhaustion. A man from Polohy reports persistent injuries to his hands and a general deterioration in his health following torture. A young man convicted of "espionage" reported in letters that he was suffering from severe back pain, which made even sitting and writing letters difficult. Regarding a former ATO participant from the Kherson region, those released reported exhaustion, significant swelling in his legs, and suspected HIV infection.

Five cases involving women illustrate various forms of vulnerability. Two elderly women were persecuted for providing financial support to Ukraine and for making pro-Ukrainian statements; one of them had a chronic illness, and the other was over 70 years old. A businesswoman from Kakhovka had serious hearing problems and was deprived of her liberty in the presence of her minor son. A woman from Donetsk was subjected to forced psychiatric treatment following politically motivated criminal prosecution. A woman from Orlyanske suffered physical abuse during an interrogation that focused primarily on her husband's military past and her son's military service.

Young victims are singled out separately. The two main victims were detained when they were approximately 19 years old. One of them disappeared shortly after reaching the age of majority, was forced to make a false confession, and was subsequently convicted of "espionage." The other, a student from Bilovodsk,

was sentenced to eight years and six months for transferring 50 hryvnias. These cases demonstrate that Russian repressive practices are applied not only to established civil society activists or individuals with a military background, but also to very young civilians, against whom the evidence, based on the content of their testimonies, could have been built around private digital content and minimal financial activity.

4. TYPOLOGY OF VIOLATIONS AND CLASSIFICATION OF CRIMES

The core category of the entire body of evidence is the deprivation of liberty of civilians without an effective and accessible procedure for reviewing the legality of such detention. Even in cases where criminal charges or convictions were later brought, the initial stage was characterized by forcible abduction, the absence of clear legal grounds, the inability to notify relatives, the absence of an independent lawyer, and the concealment of the detainee's whereabouts. Given the establishment of protected civilian status, the relevant connection to the armed conflict, and other necessary elements, such unlawful detention constitutes 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 seventeen key cases, there was a significant period during which the family did not know the detainee's whereabouts or faced official denials of the detention. The longest and most telling examples include the concealment of a young man from the Kherson region for many months, eight months of uncertainty regarding a woman from Kakhovka, years of uncertainty regarding a civilian from Dymer, and a complete lack of information about a man from Svitlodarsk following his detention in February 2023.

Enforced disappearance, when accompanied by the necessary contextual elements, may also be relevant to the classification of crimes against humanity. At the same time, the twenty August testimonies alone do not allow for a definitive establishment of all the elements of a widespread or systematic attack against the civilian population or a corresponding state or organizational policy. They should be considered as a collection of individual incidents that can be used to verify a broader pattern in conjunction with other evidence.

A third key category is torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. At least eleven of the twenty key victims have provided sufficiently detailed accounts of physical violence or severe forms of ill-treatment. The most frequently reported incidents include beatings during detention and interrogations, being struck with objects, electric shock torture, being forced to stand for long periods, deprivation of adequate food, threats of death or mutilation, being held in the cold, and being coerced into self-incrimination.

The case of the man from Kozacha Lopana involves the most diverse range of

specific torture methods. He was beaten and tortured with electric shocks in the basement of the train station; in the Hoptivka area, approximately fourteen people beat him for about four hours, threatened to cut off his ears, and then subjected him to electric shocks again. He later described beatings to his feet, water torture, the use of hot metal, and other methods. His injuries included at least three broken ribs.

In Polohy, the man was beaten with electric shocks, a baseball bat, and the butt of a rifle to the head until he lost consciousness. He describes an environment of complete dehumanization, in which he was called a "slave," and the violence was not tied to any specific trigger. Later, in Melitopol, he witnessed nightly beatings of other detainees, when guards entered the cells in groups and beat people for no apparent reason.

In the case of five civilians from the Kyiv region, the conditions of detention in Lipivka combined physical violence, prolonged exposure to the open air, forced nudity, binding, and exposure to cold and water. According to information provided by a female respondent, all of them suffered from frostbite on their limbs. One of the detainees developed gangrene, which led to the amputation of his limbs. Subsequently, in the Kursk region, there were reports of beatings, torture, overcrowded cells, and coercion to sing Russian songs.

With regard to the SNPC, the August incident requires a particularly cautious approach. No direct evidence of rape, coercion into sexual acts, or any other clearly established act of sexual violence against the primary victims has been documented. At the same time, the forced complete undressing of five bound men while they were being held outdoors may contain a sexualized or gender-based element of humiliation and constitute a form of SGBV.

The fourth major category involves the unlawful deportation of civilians outside the occupied territory of Ukraine. At least eleven of the twenty primary victims were transported to the Russian Federation after their detention, without the ability to freely choose their place of residence or refuse to be moved. 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 these cases from the subsequent voluntary departure of released civilians through the territory of the Russian Federation and Belarus.

The fifth category involves the use of Russian criminal or administrative law as a mechanism to legitimize the persecution of civilians in the occupied territory. Formalized persecution can be traced in at least eight major cases. The charges included donations to Ukraine, "espionage," "extremism," "treason," "aiding terrorist activities," pro-Ukrainian publications and appeals, as well as other actions related to disloyalty to the occupying authorities. For an assessment under international law, it is not only the content of a specific article that is important, but also the very context of the occupying state's extension of its criminal legislation to civilians in the occupied territory and its criminalization of loyalty to one's own state.

At least seven major cases show a direct link between digital data and subsequent prosecution. Old military photographs were found on one man's phone; another was photographed taking pictures of Russian soldiers; a woman's pro-Ukrainian posts and likes were scrutinized; critical messages about the Russian army were found on a young man's phone; the groups in another detainee's phone were checked; and two women were prosecuted for bank transfers in support of Ukraine. This forms a clear pattern of progression from digital screening to a political assessment of an individual, and from there—to deprivation of liberty and, in some cases, lengthy criminal sentences.

A potential hostage-taking incident in the Kyiv region warrants special legal attention. According to testimony, one of the five detained civilians was released with the demand that he convey a proposal to the head of the Makariv community to surrender, after which the other men were allegedly to be released. This pattern—the detention of individuals combined with a demand made to a third party as a condition for their release—potentially aligns with the key logic of hostage-taking. At the same time, for legal classification, it is necessary to further confirm the exact content of the demand, the intent of the detainers, and the causal link between the detention of civilians and the coercion of the third party.

In at least three major cases, there is evidence of forced labor by civilians in places of detention. A young man convicted of "espionage" is being forced to work in a sewing workshop. A man who, after being detained in the Kyiv region, was eventually transferred to the Republic of Tuva, according to information received by his wife, is working on a construction site alongside other detainees. A former ATO participant from the Kherson region was put to work on maintenance tasks, specifically in a laundry facility. Any assessment of these facts must take into account the legal status of the individuals, the nature of the coercion, the absence of pay, possible penalties for refusal, and the general conditions of detention.

Finally, the August testimonies contain indications of political persecution as a broader practice. Pro-Ukrainian statements, participation in peaceful rallies, refusal to obtain a Russian passport, refusal to work for Rosatom, financial support for Ukraine, past service in the ATO, Ukrainian professional or civic identity, and digital contacts consistently emerge as risk factors. When considered within a broader contextual framework, such incidents may be relevant to an analysis of persecution as a crime against humanity.

5. TRAFFICKING CHAINST

Chains of trafficking are one of the most informative components of the August body of evidence. They demonstrate the transition from local, unofficial places of detention to the formalized Russian penitentiary system, as well as significant geographical distances between the place of initial detention and the last known

place of detention. Equally important are the gaps in the routes: in some cases, the intermediate stages have not been established, and relatives received information only after the fact from released fellow detainees.

The most detailed account of his ordeal comes from the case of a man from Kozacha Lopana. On April 23, 2022, he was detained near his home; after a search, he was taken to the train station in Kozacha Lopana, where he was held and tortured in the basement. The next stage took place in the Hoptivka area, where the man was held for about a month in a small hotel and subjected to particularly brutal group beatings and electric shock torture. Then, instead of the promised release, he was taken across the state border to Shebekino in the Belgorod Region of the Russian Federation, where he was held in a tent camp from May 24 to November 18, 2022. On November 18, he was transferred to Pretrial Detention Center No. 2 in Stary Oskol, where he remained until August 23, 2023. His next long-term place of detention was Penal Colony No. 7 in the village of Pakino, Vladimir Oblast; from there, he was sent twice to the hospital attached to Pretrial Detention Center No. 5. In June 2026, prior to his release, the man was transported by car, then by plane and bus, after which he was returned to Ukraine on June 5 as part of a prisoner exchange.

The journey of a civilian construction worker, who was detained along with other men near Makarov on March 3, 2022, is one of the longest and least straightforward. Until April 8, he and the others were held in the area of the village of Lipivka, including outdoors and in a pit. After that, the group was transported to the Russian Federation, first to Bryansk and then to Kursk, where the main victim was held in Pretrial Detention Center No. 1. In the summer of 2022, he was transferred to occupied Crimea for less than a month (the exact city cannot be determined from the testimony), after which he was returned to the Kursk region, to a pretrial detention center in the village of Baraki, and later to Donskoye in the Rostov region. After another period of unknown transfers, the victim is, according to the latest information, in the city of Kyzyl in the Republic of Tuva, where he is being held in a barracks and forced to perform construction work.

The journey of one of the twin brothers from the village of Vesele began on March 24, 2022, from his own home. After spending approximately three hours at the local military headquarters, the brothers were taken toward Lyptsi and then on to a tent camp in the Belgorod Region of the Russian Federation, where the main victim remained until April 11, 2022. From April 11 to May 4, he was held in Pretrial Detention Center No. 2 in Stary Oskol, after which he was transferred to a penal colony in Valuyki. On September 15, 2022, the brothers were transferred to a penal colony in Oleksiyivka, where they remained until June 23, 2023. The main victim’s final long-term place of detention was Correctional Colony No. 1 in the city of Donskoy, Tula Oblast, where he remained until the prisoner exchange on October 2, 2025. His brother went through the same main stages but was not included in the exchange and, as of the time of his testimony, remained in custody.

An 18-year-old man from the Kherson region, after being abducted on May 4, 2023, was initially held in the basement of the Nova Kakhovka police station until

June 6. After the building was flooded, the group's whereabouts became unknown. In early September, the family received information about their possible detention in Kalanchak, but by the time the detainees' mother arrived, they had already been taken away. Simferopol was mentioned as the next destination, but it was not possible to identify the specific facility. Later, information emerged about Taganrog, then Rostov-on-Don, where in February 2024 an investigator confirmed that the victim was being held in Pretrial Detention Center No. 1. After the court proceedings, he was transferred to Penal Colony No. 10 in Saratov, where, according to the latest information, he continues to serve an eleven-year sentence.

The route taken by the former ATO participant from the Kherson region is more difficult to reconstruct. He was detained on July 14, 2022, in Petropavlivka. There is further information indicating he was in Kakhovka until approximately July 22, after which he was transferred to occupied Crimea. He subsequently ended up in a detention facility system where civilians were held alongside prisoners of war and forced to perform manual labor. At one point, due to his prior participation in the ATO, he was transferred to a group that the administration considered "military," but was later returned to his original group. In September 2024, he was transferred to Pretrial Detention Center No. 12 in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, Russian Federation, and on September 23, to Pretrial Detention Center No. 3 in the city of Kyzyl, Perm Krai, Russian Federation.

A woman from Kakhovka, who was detained on June 25, 2024, was held in solitary confinement for approximately eight months. Her family was initially told she was being held in a pretrial detention center in the Chongar area, but the victim herself later stated during court proceedings that she had been in Henichesk the entire time. After her sentencing and appeal, the woman was transferred to the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation, where she remained for approximately three to four months. Her next reported destination was Women's Correctional Colony No. 2 in Mordovia. During the transfer, the victim contacted her family in Tomsk once, informing them that this was merely a transit point. As of the time of documentation, the family believed she had likely arrived in Mordovia, but had not yet received official confirmation from the ICRC.
A 19-year-old student from Belovodsk was initially held for about five days at the local commandant's office, located in a police building. From there, he was taken to the Russian Federation, to Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 in Rostov-on-Don, where he remained until January 2025. After his sentencing, but before his appeal was heard, he was transferred to Chechnya. In May 2025, he was already being held at Pretrial Detention Center No. 3 in Novocherkassk, and in December 2025, he was at T-2 Prison in Yelets, Lipetsk Oblast.

A civilian man from the village of Khochova in the Kyiv region was initially held in the village itself after his detention on March 19, 2022, and was then taken away that same evening to an unknown destination. The first confirmed long-term location on Russian territory was Penal Colony No. 1 in the Bryansk region. He was subsequently transferred to the Tula region, to Penal Colony No. 1 in the city of Donskoy, where, according to the latest information, he remains.

In the case of the man from Dymer, the initial phase has been clearly established: from February 26 to March 19, 2022, he was held on the premises of the "Viknaland" enterprise. After March 19, he was taken away, and his whereabouts remained unknown for a long time. His family heard rumors about a possible transfer through Belarus, but was unable to verify this information. Later, his daughter independently confirmed that he was being held at Pretrial Detention Center No. 2 in Novozybkov, Bryansk Oblast, Russian Federation. After mid-2024, the flow of information ceased, and his current location remains unknown as of the time of this report.

An elderly man from Hlyboky was taken, following his detention on August 14, 2022, to the basement of a dormitory in the village of Strileche, where he remained until September 11. After the Russian forces retreated, he and three other men were taken to the village of Oktyabrskoye in Russia. There, the detainees were given new clothes and reassigned, after which they were moved to Nova Tavolzhanka. According to a released fellow detainee, the next location was Stary Oskol, and the victim himself was later admitted to a hospital. His exact subsequent whereabouts are unknown; in 2026, his family received a letter from him, and the ICRC and the Coordination Headquarters confirmed that he had been held captive but did not specify his current location.

The route taken by the family doctor from Melitopol followed a different pattern. After her arrest on April 25, 2025, she was held in Velyka Bilozerka for about a year. Approximately every twenty days, she was transported to Melitopol to extend her "administrative" detention. In April 2026, after criminal charges were filed, she was transferred to the Donetsk Pretrial Detention Center, from where, according to her family, court proceedings could be conducted remotely.

An elderly woman from Berdyansk, after her final arrest on March 31, 2026, informed a relative by phone once that she was being held at the Melitopol Pretrial Detention Center. Later, a private attorney determined that she was actually being held at Donetsk Pretrial Detention Center No. 1 and was being transported to Melitopol for court hearings. This case shows that even the initial location reported by the victim herself does not necessarily reflect the permanent place of detention, and that routes can be reconstructed only by cross-referencing multiple sources within a single testimony.

A man from Malaya Belozerka also describes several different places of detention, but because he had a bag over his head, he was unable to identify their locations. His testimony mentions Dniprorudne, basements, and the area near the Kakhovka Reservoir. His subsequent independent journey through Melitopol, Donetsk, Russian territory, and Belarus is not included in the chain of forced transfers during his detention.

As for the ZNPP employee, reliable information regarding his whereabouts after the abduction remains limited. His testimony mentions the Melitopol Pretrial Detention Center as his last place of detention and includes information about a planned transfer to Mariupol.

According to information received by his family, a tractor driver from the Kupiansk District, after being detained in March 2023, was held in the basement of a house in the village of Bohdanivske until approximately March 13. After that, a soldier told a local acquaintance that the man had been taken away along with another detainee. The next reliable information about his whereabouts emerged only at the end of 2024, when the acquaintance saw him among detainees on a walk at a camp on the outskirts of the Belgorod Region of the Russian Federation. The exact name of the facility, the route taken, and his current location remain unknown.

6. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

Information about conditions of detention is inconsistent due to the nature of the sources. The most detailed descriptions come directly from released detainees and relatives who received information from former fellow detainees. In other cases, families know only the name of the facility or receive brief, censored messages stating that the person is “holding up.” Therefore, the absence of specific descriptions of food, sanitation, or violence does not constitute grounds for considering the conditions adequate.

Unofficial basements and makeshift detention facilities are characterized by the highest concentration of direct physical violence. In Polohy, the victim was held in the basement of a three-story building, in a solitary confinement cell, and was beaten with electric shocks, a bat, and a rifle butt. In the basement of the Kozacha Lopana train station, a man was tortured with electric shocks, and in Hoptivka, he was subjected to hours of group beatings. In Nova Kakhovka, a young man, according to his sister, was tortured and forced to incriminate himself. In Strilets, an elderly man was held along with more than twenty civilians in the basement of a dormitory.

Food is one of the most frequently reported problems. In Strilets, three detainees were given a single loaf of bread and porridge. In Melitopol, a man from Polohy received essentially one spoonful of pea porridge and was forced to beg for additional pieces of bread. In the Donetsk pretrial detention center, a family doctor—according to her daughter—was practically not fed and was not provided with adequate drinking water; the situation improved only partially thanks to care packages from relatives. In Russian detention facilities, conditions varied depending on the institution: in Pakino, meals were initially mostly liquid and vegetarian, whereas in Yelets, another detainee received relatively acceptable food.

Overcrowding is compounded by the practice of forced standing. In the Kursk region, cells designed to hold approximately four people could accommodate between ten and fifteen detainees. In one of the penal colonies where a man from the Kyiv region was held, the cell initially held about twenty people, and later twelve to thirteen. Detainees were forced to stand next to their beds and were allowed to sit down mainly only during meals. Regarding another victim, it was reported that he was required to stand from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. In Yelets, a

young convicted man had to stand every day from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

Sanitary conditions were also used as a means of humiliation. A man in Hoptivka was not allowed to use the toilet normally for approximately eighteen days. In Yelka, showers were available about once a week. In Lipivka, men spent long periods of time standing in water and wearing wet shoes, which led to frostbite. In Strilets, detainees used roofing felt for shelter.

The failure to provide adequate medical care has particularly severe consequences in several cases. A man from Kozacha Lopana was diagnosed with cancer while in Stary Oskol, but he did not receive proper treatment. Later, due to pressure from the tumor on his esophagus, he could barely eat and required a special liquid diet, which was not properly provided. His weight improved temporarily only during two hospitalizations; upon returning to the prison, his condition deteriorated again.

This testimony also contains information about other detainees that may indicate deaths related to inadequate conditions. According to a released victim, one man living with HIV was transferred to a separate, windowless room, after which he developed pneumonia and died approximately three days later. Another detainee, according to the same witness, committed suicide by hanging himself with a sheet. This information requires separate verification but is important for assessing the overall level of danger to life and health in the relevant places of detention.

Another potentially serious medical risk was documented regarding a former ATO participant from the Kherson region. Released fellow detainees reported exhaustion, swollen legs, and suspected HIV infection. At the same time, they claimed that different people may have been given injections using the same needle. The source does not allow for determining the composition of the substances, the medical purpose of the injections, or a causal link to possible infection; therefore, these circumstances must be verified separately.

Contact with the outside world was significantly restricted in the vast majority of cases. One of the brothers from the Kharkiv region was able to write his first censored letter in April 2022, but his family did not receive it until October. According to him, phone calls to civilians were not permitted at all, unlike for prisoners of war.

At a prison in the Tula region, another civilian received about ten letters, even though his family had sent many more. In the case of the man from Kozacha Lopana, his wife sent letters to Stary Oskol every month, but only two reached him.

Parcels and care packages were also not guaranteed to arrive. In Strilets, a mother sent food and personal items, but a released fellow inmate reported that the military personnel had taken them for themselves. In the prison system where the brothers from the Kharkiv region were held, humanitarian parcels, according to the released inmate, almost never reached the inmates. In other places, the situation was better: the family of a woman from Kakhovka was able

to send money to buy food at the prison store in Chechnya, and the relatives of an elderly woman from Berdyansk were able to send her clothes and food on two occasions.

Conditions did not remain unchanged throughout the many years of detention. In several cases, former detainees report some improvement in food quality, more frequent outdoor exercise, or an end to regular beatings during a later period. This does not negate the assessment of earlier violations, but it is important for accurately reconstructing the conditions in specific facilities and preventing the conflation of different time periods into a single, unchanging description.

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

Formal criminal prosecution or an officially communicated “suspicion” has been documented for at least eight of the twenty main victims, or 40 percent. At least seven cases contain information about court hearings. At the same time, a key characteristic of these proceedings is that in many cases they began only after a prior period of de facto detention without a clear legal status.

The most striking example of such a transition is the case of a family doctor from Melitopol. She was detained in April 2025, after which she was transported to Melitopol approximately every twenty days and formally held in “administrative” detention for an alleged curfew violation. Only about a year later was she charged with “treason” for making donations to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Her family was unable to find a private attorney because, according to her daughter, lawyers were unwilling to take on such a case; she was assigned a public defender. Later, hearings to extend her pretrial detention could be conducted remotely via videoconference.

In the case of a young man from the Kherson region, criminal prosecution was preceded by months of incommunicado detention and torture aimed at extracting a confession of “espionage.” The first public defender contacted the family only in February 2024, failed to provide any documents or disclose the exact location of detention, and subsequently effectively ceased all communication. The family was able to secure an independent attorney through a civil society organization. The Russian investigation charged him under Article 276 of the Russian Criminal Code for “espionage.” One excerpt from the testimony mentions a sentence handed down on November 15, 2024—eleven years in a strict-regime penal colony; the next excerpt cites different dates for the sentencing and transfer to a penal colony, which do not align with the first. Therefore, while the fact of the eleven-year sentence is fairly clear, the exact procedural timeline requires verification.

In the Bilovodsk case, physical violence directly preceded the recording of the video confession. After his arrest, the 19-year-old student had bruises on his

arms and legs; he was forced to record a video in which he was portrayed as a “traitor” and a “terrorist.” According to the verdict, the basis for the criminal case was a transfer of 50 hryvnias as a donation via an Oschadbank account. On January 28, 2025, the Southern District Military Court sentenced him to eight years and six months in prison. The next day, his mother filed an appeal, but even before it was heard, the convict was transferred to Chechnya. At his subsequent places of detention, he continued to be pressured to cooperate and forced to accept Russian citizenship, which he refused to do.

A woman from Donetsk was prosecuted under several provisions of the occupying authorities’ criminal code related to statements about the Russian occupation, “extremist activity,” and public appeals. Posts and “likes” on VKontakte, as well as confiscated electronic devices, were used as evidence. She was later released from criminal liability but subjected to compulsory psychiatric treatment.

The family describes the case of the 73-year-old woman from Berdiansk as persecution for “extremism” and “treason.” According to information received from her attorney, part of the case is classified as “secret” and is being overseen by the FSB in Moscow. The state-appointed attorney initially failed to make contact with the family. A lawyer found by the family was able to provide basic information, but had not personally communicated with the victim prior to one of the most recent court hearings and was present only during the hearing itself. As of the time of this report, a verdict had not yet been handed down.

According to available information, the ZNPP employee was initially charged with an offense related to the illegal manufacture or use of explosives. On January 17, 2025, the case was reclassified under Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation regarding “treason.” Further procedural details are virtually nonexistent, which in itself highlights the problem of access for relatives and representatives to information regarding the criminal prosecution of a civilian.

A businesswoman from Kakhovka was sentenced to ten years in prison under Article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation after approximately eight months of solitary confinement. An appeal was filed, but the sentence was upheld. Prior to the sentencing, the family was only able to see the victim a few times; the exact number of court hearings and their locations are unknown to the respondent.

Taken together, the evidence reveals several recurring violations of the right to a fair trial: prolonged de facto detention prior to the filing of formal charges; the extraction of confessions through physical violence; the unavailability or inaction of state-appointed attorneys; limited family access to case files; “secret” proceedings; the criminalization of actions related to supporting Ukraine; the use of digital data as evidence of disloyalty; the transfer of convicted persons to remote regions before the conclusion of or immediately after procedural proceedings; and the extension of Russian criminal law to residents of the occupied territories.

In contrast, a significant portion of other civilians are being held entirely outside any criminal proceedings. The most telling example is the three-year detention of two brothers from the Kharkiv region, against whom no charges have been brought, no lawyer has been provided, no trial has been held, and no verdict has been handed down during the entire period. A similar lack of due process is evident in the cases of certain civilians from the Kyiv region who have been held in Russian penal colonies for years.

8. INFORMATION ON OTHER VICTIMS AND THE BROADER CONTEXT

The August testimonies contain a significant amount of information about people who are not included in the list of the twenty main victims. It is not advisable to mechanically total their exact number, since some individuals have not been identified, different respondents may be describing the same groups, and information about individual people is fragmentary. At the same time, the material undoubtedly covers several dozen additional individually identified or partially identified victims, as well as significantly larger groups of detainees.

In the Zaporizhzhia region, a woman from Orlyanske reports on a farmer, approximately 36 years old, who was abducted in November 2024 and held for several days in the basements of private homes before being released. In the Donetsk pretrial detention center, a woman in a severe mental state is being held alongside a family doctor; according to the respondent, she is not being provided with a referral to a hospital. In another case, an elderly woman from Berdiansk is being held in a cell with a woman approximately 45 years old who is being prosecuted in a similar case.

The Energodar case once again confirms the persecution of a group of employees at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Around the same time as the main victim, another colleague of his was detained. The respondent also recounts the story of the plant's shift supervisor, who went missing during a trip to the Crimea region, spent approximately eight months in captivity, and was released outside of official procedures.

In the Kharkiv region, particularly extensive reports of groups of people come from two sources. In the basement of a dormitory in Strilets, where an elderly man from Hlyboky was being held, there were, according to his son's estimate, more than twenty civilians. Among them was a man suffering from cancer, who was later released and subsequently died from his illness; another detainee, according to the information received, died under unknown circumstances.

In the case of the tractor driver from the Kupiansk district, an acquaintance who saw the victim in a camp in the Belgorod region of the Russian Federation in late 2024 reported a group of approximately 30–40 people on an outing and a total of about 200 detainees "from the Ukrainian side," among whom were civilians. This estimate comes from a single indirect source and cannot be

used as a confirmed number of detainees in a specific facility, but it serves as an important point of reference for further verification of the possible location of detention.

The same testimony contains information about a number of other residents of the Kupiansk district. A colleague of the main victim was detained approximately two weeks after him. Two men from Tokarivka were detained in the fall of 2022; the fate of one of them remains unknown. A woman named Natalia was released around May 31, 2024, along with five other women; according to the interviewee, she has been experiencing mental health issues since her release. The account also mentions a man detained in 2022 and a volunteer who disappeared approximately two years prior to the documentation, heading toward Lypets or Vovchansk.

The Kyiv unit demonstrates a pattern of mass detentions during the first weeks of the occupation. In Khochev, four other men were detained along with the main victim. In the Makarov area, five civilians were also detained at the same time. One of them was released that same day to serve as a go-between to convey demands to the community leader, while the others remained in custody. One of the men in this group suffered such severe frostbite and gangrene that part of his limbs had to be amputated.

The daughter of a man from Dymer also reports a significant number of other unlawfully detained residents of the Vyshhorod district. Some of them later returned to Ukraine as part of prisoner exchanges; the fate of the others remains unknown. It is important to note that relatives of various detainees arrived simultaneously at the occupied village council building and attempted to negotiate the release of their loved ones, indicating not an isolated incident in Dymer but a broader local practice of seizing civilians.

In the Kherson detention facility, a young man convicted of “espionage” has reported through his family that at least four other Ukrainian citizens are being held with him and are being prosecuted under the same charge. In another case, the detention facility where a former ATO participant was held housed dozens of people—according to one report, approximately 60–70 people in a barracks where civilians and prisoners of war may have been held together. Such information is important for researching the mixing of different legal categories of detainees and the application of regimes designed for prisoners of war to civilians.

The cases involving the man from Kozacha Lopana and the group from the Kyiv region contain the most serious reports regarding the consequences for other individuals. In addition to the aforementioned man with HIV, who died after being transferred to a separate cell, and another detainee who committed suicide, released individuals from the Kyiv group reported widespread frostbite and severe physical consequences of being held outdoors. These facts require separate documentation as potential standalone criminal incidents, rather than merely as context for the main twenty cases.

CONCLUSIONS

A body of twenty testimonies collected in August 2026 confirms that the unlawful deprivation of liberty of civilians in the cases investigated does not follow a single procedural pattern. It can take the form of short-term forcible confinement in a home, months-long incommunicado detention in a basement without any legal status, years-long detention in Russian penal colonies without charges, or criminal prosecution resulting in a conviction. What remains consistent is the primary de facto authority exercised by the Russian military, the FSB, the occupying law enforcement agencies, or the prison administrations over civilians, without an effective mechanism for immediately verifying the legality of the deprivation of liberty.

The most systematic accompanying phenomenon is the concealment of a person's whereabouts, which is a form of incommunicado detention. At least 85% of the main cases involve a significant period of informational uncertainty. Families often act as de facto investigators: they contact dozens of agencies, search for former fellow detainees, analyze photographs and videos, write to Russian institutions, find lawyers, and reconstruct routes based on fragmentary reports. In several cases, even the availability of confirmed information about a specific Russian institution did not guarantee reliable knowledge of the person's subsequent fate.

The transfer of civilians to the Russian Federation is not a peripheral but one of the central features of the body of evidence from August. At least 55% of the primary victims were forcibly transported outside Ukraine. For many, this meant being moved repeatedly through several regions and types of facilities, sometimes thousands of kilometers away from the place of detention. These transfers simultaneously complicate the search for victims, access to legal counsel, the delivery of medication, and communication with family members. Torture and physical abuse have been documented in at least 55% of the primary victims. The range of methods—from beatings during detention to electric shocks, waterboarding, hot metal, prolonged standing, forced nudity, and exposure to the cold—indicates the use of violence as a tool for interrogation, punishment, coercion to cooperate, extracting confessions, and achieving general submission. At the same time, the actual figure may be higher, as most testimonies were provided by relatives who do not have complete information about what took place inside places of detention.

A distinct and persistent pattern is the use of digital information as a tool for targeting and criminalizing civilians. Cell phones, social media, photos from past military service, bank transactions, and personal correspondence serve as grounds for detention or as key elements in subsequent prosecutions. Particularly telling are cases where minimal financial support for Ukraine or old photos from military service lead to years of imprisonment.

None of the twenty main victims was described as an active-duty military personnel at the time of their detention. Even in cases involving past military service or participation in the ATO, these were people who were already civilians

at the time of their capture. Together with the diversity of professions—ranging from a doctor, a tractor driver, and a nuclear power plant worker to construction workers and retirees—this underscores the civilian nature of the main group studied.

In the August body of testimony, judicial and criminal proceedings are not an alternative to the initial arbitrary treatment, but often constitute the next stage of the same situation and should be classified as a separate war crime. Criminal charges are brought after weeks or months of incommunicado detention; confessions are extracted through physical violence; state-appointed lawyers may be prevented from communicating with the family; cases are classified; defendants are transferred to remote regions of the Russian Federation; and loyalty to Ukraine is interpreted as "treason," "espionage," "extremism," or "terrorism."

Several cases require priority and in-depth attention: the detention and torture of a seriously ill man from Kozacha Lopana; the possible use of five civilians from the Kyiv region as hostages to force the head of the community to surrender; the long-term detention of two brothers without any criminal proceedings; the persecution of a 19-year-old student over a 50-hryvnia transfer; the eight-month concealment and official denial of the detention of a woman from Kakhovka; the systematic extension of the "administrative" detention of a doctor from Melitopol, which was later reclassified as a case of "treason"; and the disappearance and criminal prosecution of an employee of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant following his refusal to integrate into the "Rosatom" system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results of the analysis of testimony from witnesses and individuals unlawfully deprived of their personal 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. Law enforcement agencies:

a) ensure the continuous and systematic documentation of cases of unlawful deprivation of liberty, including the circumstances of detention, places and conditions of detention, the routes taken by detainees, the use of torture and cruel 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 involving 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 an appropriate 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 the 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-gathering 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 borders of 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.

i) separately systematize and investigate the persecution of current and former employees of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant as a distinct risk profile. Given the repeated reports of detentions, searches, coercion to sign contracts with "Rosatom," staff surveys, phone inspections, beatings, keeping employees in handcuffs, threats, and pressure on individuals who refused to cooperate with the occupying administration, it is advisable for law enforcement agencies to designate the Zaporizhzhia NPP and the city of Energodar as a separate analytical focus for documentation. Within this area, a list should be compiled of affected plant employees, including their positions, departments, dates of detention, places of detention, circumstances of coercion to cooperate, as well as the individuals and entities involved in detentions, interrogations, questioning, and monitoring of personnel.

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.

f) document the militarization of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and the related violations not only as a threat to nuclear safety, but also as the context for the unlawful deprivation of liberty of civilians. Evidence regarding the deployment of military personnel, equipment, and ammunition; the use of the plant's facilities; the rotation of security forces; control over personnel; the collection of personal data; forced labor; and the persecution of employees must be analyzed in conjunction with one another. It is important for international institutions—particularly those dealing with nuclear safety issues—to emphasize that the occupying forces' control over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant was accompanied not only by technological risks but also by repression against civilian personnel, including unlawful detentions, forced displacement, torture, psychological pressure, and coercion to cooperate.

g) ensure priority support for the families of detained or missing ZNPP employees and residents of Energodar, particularly with regard to search efforts, legal assistance, medical care, and documentation. In many cases in Energodar, families independently determined the whereabouts of the affected individuals, contacted the occupying authorities, Ukrainian government agencies, and international organizations, paid for communications, travel, and attorneys, and maintained communication through controlled channels. Given the particular risk faced by critical infrastructure workers and their families, it is advisable to establish or strengthen a dedicated support mechanism for such families: including the formal recognition of the status of a missing or unlawfully detained person, assistance in gathering documents, preparation of appeals to national and international bodies, as well as the systematic transmission of information for the investigation of war crimes related to the occupying forces' control over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

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 Political Prisoners of the Kremlin” have identified and interviewed more than 750 people—witnesses and victims of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and other international crimes against the civilian population. Of these, 15 individuals were identified and documented during a fact-finding mission in August 2026. At the same time, the total number of individuals identified by the Association through fact-finding, 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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