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For the Project of General Comment of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances on “women, girls and enforced disappearances”

July 15, 2025

The authors have prepared this material based on their experience documenting and analyzing Russia's war crimes committed against Ukraine during the aggressive war from 2014 to the present.

Kharkiv Human Rights Group is a leading Ukrainian human rights organization that collects and analyzes databases on people affected by the war crimes of the Russian army. The organization has at its disposal tens of thousands of cases, a significant part of which can be classified as enforced disappearances. In some cases, the stories of the victims became known, as the enforced disappearance had a time frame; in other cases, the victims are considered missing because there is no information about them. The KhPG databases contain information about enforced disappearances of women and children, including girls.

Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial Brussels is a human rights organization focusing on protection of the rights of vulnerable groups in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region (ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, LGBTI+, migrants, stateless persons, vulnerable children, with a special focus on the rights of women and girls). From the very beginning of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, ADC Memorial has been monitoring the situation of vulnerable groups affected by the war (see reports "[Roma and War](#)" (2015); "[Roma from Ukraine: a Year of War and Refugee](#)" (2023); "[The Year of Monitoring the Situation of Minorities and Migrants](#)" (2023); "[Violation of LGBTI+ rights in Crimea and Donbas: the problem of homophobia in territories not controlled by Ukraine](#)" (2017) and others).

Introduction

According to the report of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets (May 1, 2025, presentation of the Annual Report-2024), more than 16,000 Ukrainian civilians are missing; about 1,800 of them are known to be illegally imprisoned in Russia. At the time of writing, about 80 Ukrainian women are known to be in pre-trial detention in Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine; 20 of them have minor children, 5 of them have many children. It is known that 28 cases of women citizens of Ukraine have been transferred to the Russian courts (the list is maintained by the Human Rights Center Memorial). The database of the T4R project ("Tribunal for Putin") contains information about more than 350 Ukrainian women victims of enforced disappearance; at least 25 of them are minors; at least one is severely disabled.

In the territories occupied by Russia, the practice of short-term and long-term enforced disappearances has been normalized, meaning arbitrary detention violating official procedures. Russian authorities deny the fact of detention and conceal information about the whereabouts of persons deprived of their liberty. It may take several days or several years from the moment of the victims' disappearance to the information about their whereabouts in a place of detention or indictment becomes known. All this time, the victims are at risk of mistreatment or the use of illegal violent methods and may be held in unofficial places of detention.

Anna E. disappeared in December 2022 in Kherson and for two years was held in a pre-trial detention center (SIZO-2) in Simferopol in complete isolation, without any contact with relatives or access to a lawyer. In October 2024, the Crimean FSB announced that Anna E. had been detained on suspicion of espionage.

Specific risks for women and girls in situations of enforced disappearance during the war should be considered the loss of reproductive possibilities in the future due to torture and inhumane conditions of detention in places of deprivation of liberty; problems of women's health and physiology in captivity (lack of hygiene products, pregnancy, childbirth, abortions, etc.); the risk of sexualized violence, exploitation; various risks during "filtration" at the check-points. The problem of the return of abducted children (including girls) in conditions of concealment of information by kidnappers, change of personal data of children, their indoctrination and identity change. Threats to seize their children and take them to orphanages in Russia became a normalized specific of pressure on women.

Combining their experience in documenting and analysis, KhPG and ADC Memorial consider it important to take into account in future general comment No. 2 certain categories of victims of enforced disappearances, situations of special risk and their particular vulnerability. The examples given in this report are taken from the databases held by the KhPG, as well as from open sources. The names of the victims are indicated in full if their case was widely covered in the media and had a great resonance.

Women and girls belonging to traditional ethnic and/or religious communities (Roma, Muslim women)

The abduction of such women and girls, and even the very fact of being outside the community, especially in an aggressive environment (among aggressors, in places of deprivation of liberty), the inability to live a traditional life, and to practice religious rituals that are customary and obligatory for the community (including those related to hygiene, dress code, food bans, etc.) become a situation of special risk for them. If such women/girls are sexually abused, they may consider it a terrible disgrace due to their traditional and/or religious beliefs, which can lead to mental health problems, including suicide.

Women who have survived enforced disappearances may be discriminated against within their communities, as being among non-community men or simply in a different environment, suspicions or becoming aware of the facts of sexualized violence against these women may be perceived as "desecration" of women, evidence of their immoral behavior, and shame caused by their fault. Family members of such women, including children born as a result of violence, may be discriminated against by association. Such special risks can be presumed as "honor killings", infanticide, and reproductive violence (forced abortions, gynecological surgeries).

Female military personnel; women associated with the military

In the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, female military personnel has specificity in the situation of the enforced disappearances, as, being de facto captured, they do not receive the status of prisoners of war, they are in places of incommunicado detention, and have no chance of exchanging prisoners of war. This is especially true for women who perform humanitarian and civilian functions in the army (medical care, cooking, office work, etc.), as well as female civilians with family ties to the military.

One of the reasons for the abduction of women of all ages is the service of their close relatives (husbands, sons) in the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine or in the Ukrainian army. Often, long after the abduction (from several months to several years), such women are found in Russian pre-trial detention facilities, where, according to the results of the investigation, they are charged with collaboration with a foreign state, espionage, and treason.

It is known from experts and survivors of enforced disappearances that female military personnel and women associated with military personnel suffer from special brutality and arbitrariness of guards, investigators and special services personnel in places of deprivation of liberty.

Olga Ch., mother of a serviceman of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, was abducted in May 2023. She was brutally tortured during interrogations; her whole body was covered in bruises and burns. Due to the torture, she started bleeding, which did not stop for several months. For more than a year, the family did not know anything about Olga's whereabouts; a criminal case was opened only in August 2024. On December 12, 2024, Olga Ch. was sentenced to 13 years in a penal colony under Article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("Espionage").

Alla, a 52-year-old resident of Izyum, mother of an Ukrainian Security Service officer, was abducted from home with her husband on July 1, 2022 during the Russian occupation of Izyum. They were held in a barn for 10 days, where her husband was beaten, and Alla was subjected to sexualized violence in order to obtain information about her son.

There were documented cases of enforced disappearances of civilian victims who were required to provide information about the Ukrainian army, the location of Ukrainian military units, etc.

In March 2022, 15-year-old girls Lisa and Nastya were abducted on a street in Snehurivka, Mykolaiv region, during the Russian occupation. They were taken to the basement of a grain elevator. Russian officers demanded information from them about where the Ukrainian military was located, and threatened to cut off their fingers if they remained silent. On the 4th day of detention, without water or food, the girls were able to break down the doors and escape.

Girls/women abducted because of their gender

Deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia is a well-known and well-documented war crime, which became the reason for the ICC warrant against Russian President Putin and the children's Ombudsman Lvova-Belova. Children, especially younger ones, who have no way to resist abduction, find themselves forcibly disappeared: their whereabouts are unknown to the Ukrainian side, they are moved to distant regions of Russia, transferred to institutions, and if adopted by a Russian foster family, their personal data (name, date and place of birth, citizenship) is changed.

In some cases, there is reason to believe that abducted children are being adopted based on gender preference. Thus, the first documented case of adoption (rather than temporary custody) of an abducted child is a girl adopted by a high-ranking Russian official.

Deputy and leader of a political party, 70-year-old Sergei Mironov and his wife adopted a 10-month-old girl from the Kherson region in 2022. At first, Mironov's wife chose two children in the Kherson orphanage – this girl and a 2-year-old boy. Using the administrative power of her husband, she took them to Moscow. However, only the girl was adopted, and her first name, middle name, last name, and place of birth were changed in her documents. As for the boy, it's only known that he received a new birth certificate a year after moving to the Moscow region. Presumably, the preferred adoption of a girl may be related to her gender.

In a war situation, there is a high risk of women and girls being involved in trafficking and sexual exploitation, including by the military using their power in the occupied territories.

One of the victims of human trafficking was a civil servant from the city of Kamenka-Dneprovskaya, Zaporizhia region, Elena Yagupova. She was abducted from her home as wife of a military servant of the Ukrainian Army on October 6, 2022. Later, she was illegally detained at a local police station, and then transported to a temporary detention facility in the village of Bolshaya Belozerka. On January 18, 2023, she and the other victims of the abduction were taken to the city of Vasilevka, where the verdict of "deportation" was read out and they were filmed on camera as they left towards Ukraine. However, it turned out that this was only a performance, and all the prisoners were handed over to the Russian commander of the engineering troops, who led the construction of the second line of defense in the Zaporizhia area. The captives ended up in labor slavery: the men dug trenches, and the women were exploited in back jobs and subjected to torture and sexualized violence. Yelena Yagupova was subjected to torture, rape, and psychological pressure for two months of illegal detention and exploitation. After liberation, she was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury of her head, hip and shoulder joint injuries, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

LBTI+

While the risk of all kinds of violence, including sexualized violence, is very high for female victims of enforced disappearance, it increases even more if they belong to the LBTI+ community. Of particular note are the problems of keeping trans-persons in places of incarceration, where they may end up in the same cell with people of a different gender and be subjected to psychological, physical and sexually-motivated violence.

Female journalists; women notable for their appearances in the media and social networks

During the war, the specific risk for this category of women is criminalization of journalistic work and dissemination of information; accusations of espionage and other crimes.

One of a widely known cases, it is the story of Victoria Roshchina, a Ukrainian journalist detained by the Russian military in the summer of 2023 when she was collecting information in the Russian-occupied territory of the Zaporizhia region. Nothing was known about her for nine months; in May 2024, the Russian Defense Ministry confirmed her detention, without specifying what she was suspected of or accused of. In places of incarceration, in particular, in SIZO-2 in Taganrog, Roshchina was tortured. She was on the exchange list, but in September 2024 she died in jail (according to the Russian authorities, during the transfer from Taganrog to Moscow). Her body was returned to Ukraine without a number of organs, which makes it difficult to determine the causes of death. There is reason to believe that she was murdered.

Besides, at least 8 journalists have been victims of enforced disappearances. Some of them disappeared for several days and were then released (Crimean Tatar journalists Ediye Muslimova and Lutfie Zudieva); the story of some others became known (Irina Danilovich and Irina Gorobtsova were on trial and then were sentenced; Anastasia Glukhovskaya and Yana Suvorova were charged, but their whereabouts at the time of submitting this report is unknown; The fate of journalists Irina Levchenko (disappeared on May 6, 2023) and Zhanna Kiselyova (abducted on June 27, 2024) is unknown.

Women/girls with disabilities and health problems

Women and girls with health problems (injuries, illnesses, disabilities) have special risks in a situation of forced disappearance. In the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, this applies, among other things, to the transportation of hospitals, boarding schools, nursing homes, and other institutions to Russia.

Angela N., born in 1980, a resident of Melitopol, was abducted. She suffers from a rare chronic disease — Raynaud's syndrome, her two-year-old son requires surgery. Her abduction became known from the open court chronicle; on January 27, 2024, she was sentenced to a real term of imprisonment under Part 2 of Article 280 of the Criminal Code of Russia ("Public calls for extremist activities") and Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code of Russia (verbal support of terrorism on the Internet).

Irina K., born in 1971, resident of the Zaporizhia region, was abducted in October 2023. She was incommunicado for about 20 days; her abduction became known only when the trial began. Irina suffers from Parkinson's disease, her condition worsens, as she does not receive the necessary medical care in

the pre-trial detention facility. During the trial, it was visible that she had uncontrollable hand movements; she complained that she could not sleep.

Abducted and imprisoned women: a systemic problem of torture, sexualized violence and humiliation

The documented cases of women who were victims of enforced disappearances and who were in places of detention, indicate that brutal torture, humiliation, and sexualized violence are used massively, universally, and systematically against abducted and imprisoned Ukrainian women. In contrast to the practice adopted in ordinary prisons and colonies, where female guards inspect female prisoners and carry out other routine actions, Ukrainian women are searched by men, while being forced to strip naked, walk naked, blindfolded. The widespread torture and humiliation pфmy a distinctly sexualized component (for example, women are forced to sit on a bottle by driving it into their genitals).

These forms of torture and ill-treatment are applied to abducted Ukrainian women en masse in a wide variety of places of deprivation of liberty (prisons, colonies, pre-trial detention facilities, basements, including during filtration). There are serious reasons to believe that such treatment of abducted and imprisoned women is sanctioned by the Russian authorities and aims to break down resistance and demoralize not only the women themselves and their relatives, who suffer from the fact that their families were directly affected by the enforced disappearance, but also Ukrainian society as a whole.

Since February 24, 2022, the UN monitoring group has recorded 484 cases of conflict-related sexualized violence committed by representatives of the Russian state against civilians and military prisoners, including 119 women and 13 girls. These include gang rapes, attempted rapes, genital mutilation, forced exposure, beatings or electric shocks to the genitals, as well as threats of rape. ([Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025](#)).

Appr. 80% of the 281 civilians released as a result of the exchange reported torture or other forms of ill-treatment during their detention. At least 6 cases of sexualized violence against women have been documented. One of the women who was sexually abused suffered a miscarriage due to electric shock ([Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 1 September 2024 – 30 November 2024](#)).

In 2019, Natalia Vlasova, mother of a 9-year-old girl, was detained at a checkpoint on her way to Donetsk. Her location became known only during the trial in June 2024. As Natalia told the court, she was tortured for four months in the "Isolation" prison in Donetsk: She was gang-raped by up to 15 people, her teeth were sawed off with a file, she was beaten, doused with water, tortured with electric shocks, and locked up at night standing in a so called "glass" (a narrow room where it is impossible to sit down). A military court sentenced her to 18 years in a penal colony under the article "terrorism".

Since February 2022, OHCHR has documented the deaths of 32 Ukrainian civilians (7 of them women) as a result of torture, inadequate medical care, or inhumane conditions in official and unofficial places of detention in the occupied territory and in the Russian Federation.

Proposed recommendations

Support (psychological, social, medical, etc.) for female survivors of enforced disappearances and women who are looking for their abducted relatives.

Interaction of government agencies with NGOs that search for abducted women/girls

Maintaining disaggregated statistics on cases of enforced disappearances, including gender aspects and taking into account different categories of women (ethnicity, affiliation with the military, professional activities (journalists, human rights defenders, activists, civil servants, teachers)

Inclusion in the monitoring and investigation of cases of enforced disappearances of all possible places of deprivation of liberty, both institutional and spontaneously created by aggressors during the armed conflict/war.