

Ukraine 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

Note: The human rights situation in territories occupied by Russia at the time of writing, including Crimea and parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, are covered in a separate subsection (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for Ukraine, section on Russia-occupied Areas). The main body of this report covers the human rights situation in Ukrainian government-controlled territory as of the end of 2024; thus, abuses committed by Russia's forces on territory liberated from Russia's control during the reporting period are included in the main body of this report.

The Russia-Ukraine war continued during the year, marked by war crimes, crimes against humanity, and human rights abuses committed by Russia's officials and forces. Throughout the year, Russia's forces launched repeated attacks affecting civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure, including missile and drone strikes throughout Ukraine hitting multifamily residences and critical infrastructure such as power generation and transmission, water, and heating facilities. Civil society and defense analysts reported Russia launched 13,925 missiles and drones at targets in Ukraine during the year. (See *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for Ukraine, section on Russia-occupied Areas, for abuses committed by Russian military,

security, and proxy forces in those territories Russia occupied at year's end).

Significant human rights issues involving Ukrainian government officials included credible reports of: torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association; and the significant presence of any of the worst forms of child labor. Some of these human rights issues stemmed from martial law, which continued to curtail democratic freedoms due to wartime conditions, including freedom of the press and legal protections.

The government often did not take adequate steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports indicating the Ukrainian government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

Law enforcement agencies continued to investigate killings and other crimes committed during the Revolution of Dignity protests in Kyiv in 2013-14.

There were extensive civilian casualties in connection with the Russia-Ukraine war. On September 12, Ukrainian authorities and media reported shelling by Russia's forces in Donetsk Oblast killed three Ukrainian employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross and wounded two others.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-related Abuses

The Russia-Ukraine war significantly raised the level of violence and scope of abuses throughout the country.

International organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), issued periodic reports documenting abuses committed by Russia and Ukraine during the war.

The OHCHR noted hostilities continued to affect the lives of civilians

throughout the country, but particularly those residing in or near Russia-occupied areas. According to survivors in liberated areas and Ukrainian authorities, retreating Russian forces left behind mined areas with no regard for civilian life. Ukrainian authorities maintained that, in some cases, mined territory complicated the discovery of evidence of war crimes committed by Russia's forces, including mass burials.

In an October report, the United Nations noted Russian forces continued to conduct “massive waves of attacks” against critical infrastructure, particularly related to energy, leading to blackouts, with “severe effects on children, older persons, and persons living with a disability or a medical condition.” Between March 22 and August 31, the OHCHR UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) recorded nine waves of Russian long-range attacks on such infrastructure, which resulted in electricity, heating, and water outages that affected millions of persons. Between March and August, the HRMMU recorded 36 strikes on power generation facilities in nine regions, seven on hydroelectric plants in five regions, two on renewable energy facilities in one region, and two on heating plants in two regions – as well as at least 101 strikes on power distribution and transmission facilities in 17 regions. These attacks also killed at least 18 and injured at least 84 civilians. The commission also noted continued Russian attacks affecting medical institutions, cultural objects, and commercial buildings.

Russia's forces also routinely struck civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and residential facilities, and Russia's armed forces routinely bombarded civilian areas, leading to the deaths of hundreds of civilians. According to the OHCHR, the majority of civilian casualties (96 percent) were caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas such as artillery shells and rockets, bombs, missiles, loitering munitions, and other explosive munitions dropped by unmanned aerial vehicles.

As of August, the World Health Organization (WHO) recorded 1,940 attacks affecting health care since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, 86 percent of which affected health-care facilities. The WHO added that the rate of attacks had "intensified significantly" since December 2023. For example, on July 8, Russia's forces conducted a mass missile attack on Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, and Kirovohrad oblasts, involving more than 40 missiles. The attacks killed at least 42 persons and injured at least 190. One missile struck the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital, the largest institute for specialized pediatric care in Ukraine, killing two persons and injuring 16 others, including seven children.

As of the end of November, the OHCHR recorded 9,715 civilian deaths in Ukrainian government-controlled areas since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022. The OHCHR estimated the actual figures were considerably higher but continued fighting constrained its documentation efforts. The OHCHR reported July was the deadliest month for civilians since

October 2022.

Numerous international organizations, NGOs, and Ukrainian government agencies reported on Russia's systematic forcible transfer and deportation of Ukraine's children. (See *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for Ukraine, section on Russia-occupied Areas.)

The Ministry of Reintegration stated Russia and Russia-led proxy forces refused to return the children to their parents when Ukrainian forces liberated formerly Russia-controlled territories. Russia did not allow sufficient access to international observers or organizations to locate or return children; in some cases, if children were located, relatives had to undertake costly and dangerous trips to Russia and endure harassment and interrogation by security forces to retrieve their children. As of October, Children of War, a local NGO, reported that of the 19,547 children reportedly deported or forcibly displaced, only 388 had returned.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for the press and other media, but authorities did not always respect these rights. Following the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a decree imposing martial law, which

permitted further restrictions on the media and media freedoms. For example, the national “telemarathon” – a rotating platform of channels that promoted the government line on war reporting – enabled an unprecedented level of war-time government control over primetime television news. Moreover, some media outlets reported being removed from lucrative terrestrial broadcasting contracts and facing pressure from the Office of the President as early as the spring of 2022. In October, the European Commission expressed concern about the government monopolization of television, calling for a restoration of a “pluralistic media landscape.”

The government banned, blocked, or sanctioned media outlets and individual journalists deemed a threat to national security or who expressed positions authorities believed undermined the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Some speakers who were critical of the government were also blacklisted from government-directed news programming. Investigative journalists critical of the government were sometimes targeted by negative social media campaigns, sometimes via government-friendly channels.

With some exceptions related to the war and national security, individuals in areas under Ukrainian government control could generally criticize the government publicly and privately and discuss matters of public interest without fear of official reprisal.

The law criminalized the display of communist and Nazi symbols as well as the manufacture or promotion of the St. George's ribbon, a symbol associated with Russia's forces and Russian irredentism. In April, Kharkiv authorities charged a local resident with the distribution and use of communist symbols and materials on social networks.

The law prohibited statements that threatened the country's territorial integrity, promoted war, instigated racial or religious conflict, or supported Russia in its war with Ukraine, and the government prosecuted individuals under these laws.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Authorities sometimes initiated and condoned harassment of journalists. There were reports of government officials threatening to attack journalists, as well as reports of attacks on journalists who reported on corruption. In January, investigative journalist Yuriy Nikolov was accosted at his home, and a handwritten sign reading "traitor" was stuck to his door.

In 2023, Gonzalo Lira, a Chilean-American filmmaker, was arrested and detained on charges of "justifying Russia's military actions in Ukraine," which was illegal under the Criminal Code. His health deteriorated in detention. On January 12, he died of illness that could have resulted from neglect or improper treatment.

The government arrested and charged several politicians under the Criminal

Code due to alleged pro-Russian activities. In November, authorities charged Member of Parliament Evgeny Shevchenko with treason, in part for his pro-Russian positions calling for changing the boundaries of Ukrainian territory in parliamentary speeches and on YouTube and Telegram.

Some journalists reported being threatened by security officials with military conscription in retaliation for reporting critical of the administration. Some outlets reported security services placed their employees under surveillance. For example, Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) officials allegedly surveilled journalists working for investigative outlet *Bihus.info* on a story that led to President Zelenskyy dismissing Roman Semchenko, the head of the SBU Department for the Protection of National Statehood, on January 31.

On May 10, Mykhailo Tkach, head of the investigative department of *Ukrainska Pravda*, received threats from an unknown individual claiming to be Oleksandr Slobozhenko, the subject of one of Tkach's investigative reports. Shortly thereafter, Tkach and other *Ukrainska Pravda* journalists received threatening emails and messages from anonymous accounts. The Shevchenkivskyi Police Department opened an investigation in response.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

The NGO Freedom House during the year rated the country's press as

“partly free.” Independent media and internet news sites were active and expressed a wide range of views, but the government took some actions to restrict media and freedom of expression, citing the national security interests to counter Russian disinformation and address other wartime security concerns.

Broadcast media consolidated around government-led programming since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. In 2022, six television stations (1+1, Ukraina 24, Inter, ICTV, public broadcaster Suspilne, and the government outlet Rada) started producing around-the-clock coverage in Ukrainian, called the “telemarathon,” to convey to the public a unified wartime message. Each of the stations producing content had several hours to fill daily; the outlets produced their own content but coordinated with one another to avoid programming the same commentators. In May, Suspilne ended its participation in the single television broadcast.

Media watchdogs expressed concerns the single television broadcast could result in greater government influence over broadcasting content. They reported there was mutual agreement among media groups involved to curate which politicians appeared on air and to less actively feature some more critical commentators and public figures. Television stations considered to be affiliated with opposition parties, including Channel 5, Pryamyy, and Espresso, did not participate in the unified broadcast, although the three channels voluntarily presented the 24-hour programming by the

other channels at times. If a channel refused to reduce its own programming to less than 12 hours to accommodate the livestream, officials retaliated by removing the network from national digital terrestrial frequencies.

The largest and most successful privately owned media belonged to oligarchs; this was particularly the case for television stations.

There were instances in which the government practiced censorship, restricted content, and penalized individuals and media outlets for reportedly criticizing measures taken by authorities or expressing pro-Russia views, through imposing financial sanctions, banning websites, and blocking television channels. Media professionals asserted they were denied access to government proceedings by state officials following reporting on sensitive matters. There were allegations authorities threatened to prosecute journalists in retaliation for their work.

Throughout the conflict, both independent and state-owned media periodically engaged in self-censorship when reporting stories that might be deemed insufficiently patriotic by the public or used by Russia for propaganda purposes.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The constitution provided for freedom of association as a fundamental right and established the right to participate in independent trade unions. The law provided the right for most workers to form and join independent unions, to bargain collectively, and to conduct legal strikes.

There were no laws or legal mechanisms to prevent antiunion discrimination, although the labor code required employers to provide justification for layoffs and firings, and union activity was not an acceptable justification. Legal recourse was available for reinstatement, payment of back wages, and punitive damages, although observers described court enforcement as arbitrary and unpredictable, with damages too low to create incentives for compliance on the part of employers.

The law contained several limits to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Worker organizations considered several laws excessively complex and contradictory. Two laws established the status of trade unions as legal entities only after state registration. Under another law, a trade union was considered a legal entity upon adoption of its statute. The inherent conflict between these laws created obstacles for workers seeking to form trade unions. Unions also reported significant bureaucratic hurdles in the registration process, including the payment of notary fees and

requirements to visit as many as 10 different government offices.

Freedom of association rights were guaranteed for the vast majority of workers. In March, domestic worker activists formed a new labor union in the country, the Union of Home Staff, to advocate for domestic workers. It was officially registered in July.

Due to the war, information was not available regarding the effectiveness of enforcement of laws providing for freedom of association and collective bargaining, including how frequently penalties were applied and whether penalties were commensurate with those for analogous violations such as civil rights violations.

Worker organizations stated the legal procedure to initiate a strike was complex and significantly hindered strike action, artificially lowering the numbers of industrial strikes. The legal process for industrial disputes required initial consultation, conciliation and mediation, and labor arbitration allowing involved parties to draw out the process for months. Workers could vote to strike only after completion of this process, a decision the courts could still block. The requirement that a large percentage of the workforce (two-thirds of general workers' meeting delegates or 50 percent of workers in an enterprise) had to vote in favor of a strike before it could be called further restricted the right to strike. The government could also deny workers the right to strike on national security grounds or to protect the health or "rights and liberties" of citizens. The law prohibited strikes by

broad categories of workers, including personnel in the Office of the Prosecutor General, judiciary, armed forces, security services, law enforcement agencies, transportation sector, and public-service sector.

Martial law restricted the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens and specifically prohibited workers from public protest and strikes. In March 2022, the Law on Organizing Labor Relations under Martial Law came into effect, clarifying relevant restrictions on constitutional rights and freedoms. In accordance with this law, employers could unilaterally suspend certain provisions of the collective bargaining agreement.

In 2022, President Zelenskyy signed a law limiting collective bargaining rights for workers for any employer with 250 or fewer employees and broader martial law-related legislation that allowed for the unilateral suspension of collective bargaining clauses by employers – both applicable until the end of martial law. The law empowered employers to negotiate almost all conditions of employment (including but not limited to wages, hours, leave, and conditions of work) through individual contracts with employees. The law also allowed employers to ignore the terms of existing collective agreements in individual employment contracts. The law was passed with an amendment that it would only apply during martial law, and governing party members of parliament insisted the law was passed as a stop-gap wartime measure.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The minimum wage was set simultaneously in monthly and hourly amounts. The minimum wage was a state social guarantee, mandatory throughout the country for enterprises of all forms of ownership and management and individuals who used the labor of employees, under any system of payment. The minimum wage was set at an amount not lower than the national poverty line/subsistence minimum.

The law provided that normal working hours of employees could not exceed 40 hours per week. During martial law, a normal workweek could be increased to 60 hours for certain critical workers. In August 2022, the president signed a law introducing private contracts between employers and employees and removing previously stringent restrictions on firing. It permitted all employers to hire up to 10 percent of their workforce on contracts with nonfixed work time, or “zero-hour” contracts, under which employees were required to be “on call” each day for work assigned but could be assigned as few as 32 hours per month.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law required employers to adhere to appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards. Employers sometimes ignored these regulations due to the lack of enforcement or strict imposition of penalties. The law provided workers the right to remove themselves from dangerous working conditions without jeopardizing their continued employment. Employers in the metal and mining industries often violated this rule and retaliated against workers by pressuring them to quit.

Despite active fighting with Russia's forces, especially in the Ukrainian government-controlled industrial areas of the eastern and southern regions of the country, enterprises involved in mining, energy, media, retail, clay production, and transportation continued to operate, although at reduced outputs due to continued Russian attacks. The armed conflict resulted in extensive damage to mines and plants, the loss of electricity, destroyed transformers, physical damage from shelling, and alleged intentional flooding of mines by combined Russia-led forces. Miners were especially vulnerable, as losses of electrical power could strand them underground. The loss of electrical power also threatened the operability of mine safety equipment that prevented the buildup of explosive gases.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The State Labor Service (SLS) was responsible for enforcing wage, hour, and

OSH laws and regularly applied penalties when employers failed to resolve violations after receiving their first SLS warning. The law established a list of grounds under which labor inspections could be conducted in wartime: to verify a possible threat to the rights, legitimate interests, life, and health of a person; to protect the environment and ensure the security of the state; to fulfill Ukraine's international obligations or the decisions of the central executive bodies; and to detect informal employment and the legality of employment contract termination. The government did not effectively enforce OSH laws, and penalties were less than those of other similar crimes such as negligence.

According to official data, the number of inspectors (as of December) was 804, which experts assessed was insufficient to enforce compliance.

Under martial law, if an employer remedied the violations found during an inspection, the fines provided for in the labor code were not applied; at the same time, penalties were applied regularly if the violations were not fixed after a warning. Also, the SLS provided information and advised employees and employers regarding the requirements of the legislation on labor and labor protection under martial law. There were also active information campaigns on preventing undeclared work and labor trafficking.

Antibullying legislation entered into force in 2022, but because of wartime restrictions, labor inspectors could not monitor compliance.

Due to the war, up-to-date statistics on the informal sector were unavailable. According to the State Labor Service, as of 2023, there were more than three million undeclared workers. The number of individuals employed in the informal sector during the year was believed to be even higher because of the Russia-Ukraine war and resultant elimination of jobs and mass internal and external migration.

Informal workers were not covered by wage, hour, or OSH laws and inspections.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of Ukrainian authorities. The Russia-Ukraine war spurred significant numbers of missing persons since 2014. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, more than 55,000 individuals were missing as of September.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but the government did not always observe these requirements.

The law authorized detention for 72 hours before a judge was required to authorize continued detention. In some cases, authorities detained persons for longer than three days without a warrant. A bail system existed. A court could, in lieu of detention, order house arrest, release on personal recognizance, release on the guarantee of a high official, or limit liberty (house arrest, travel ban) pending trial.

On July 18, the Constitutional Court struck down a provision in the Criminal Code that allowed two-month automatic extensions of pretrial detention if the court could not review the case.

The OHCHR continued to receive allegations of arbitrary arrest. For example, in a December report, the OHCHR noted five cases in which Ukrainian authorities allegedly arbitrarily detained men who attempted to invoke their right of conscientious objection to military service. The OHCHR reported authorities detained the men between two and four days and subjected them to mistreatment or torture, including beatings and suffocation. Additionally, the United Nations continued to report on cases of arbitrary detention in previous years. In February, the UN special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment published a report recording interviews from 2023 with detainees in Ukrainian custody. In some cases, detainees reported the SBU arrested them without warrants, held them incommunicado, beat them, and forced them to sign documents.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the constitution and law prohibited such practices, there were credible reports law enforcement authorities employed them. There were reports authorities abused and at times tortured persons in custody, including prisoners of war (POWs).

In August, the State Bureau of Investigation served a notice of suspicion to four law enforcement officers from the Bozhkivska correctional colony No. 16, Poltava Oblast, for reportedly engaging in torture and cruel and degrading punishment, including beating victims with rubber batons and sticks. The suspects were charged with exceeding their official authority and

faced up to 10 years in prison.

In a July report, the OHCHR noted that in interviews conducted between March and May, Russian POWs in Ukrainian custody reported torture and mistreatment, including during interrogations, while in transit to official places of internment. Some POWs reported being tortured and then forced to make videos apologizing for their actions. As of August, the OHCHR reported half of all interviewed Russian POWs in Ukrainian custody reported torture or other forms of mistreatment, primarily in the initial stages of internment.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

Child Marriage

The minimum age for marriage was 18. A court could grant permission to a child as young as 16 to marry if it found marriage to be in the child's interest. Romani rights groups reported early marriages involving girls younger than 18 were common in the Romani community. The government enforced the law effectively.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. Despite martial law in Ukraine, the asylum procedure continued to function. Amendments to laws in February 2023 limited access to asylum at Ukraine's borders. International and domestic organizations reported the system for protecting asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern did not operate effectively – protection gaps were generally the result of a lack of implementation and resource constraints. High turnover among refugee status determination staff and insufficient interpretation services continued to impact the quality of services and decision making.

Provision of First Asylum

Protection for refugees and asylum seekers was insufficient, due to gaps in the law and the system of implementation.

The State Migration Service continued accepting and processing asylum applications in nonoccupied territory, away from hostilities. Humanitarian organizations expressed concern regarding limited access to asylum for Belarusians and citizens of Russia, who faced barriers to renewing residency in Ukraine and risked deportation.

The law permitted authorities to reject many asylum applications without a thorough case assessment. In other instances, government officials reportedly declined to accept initial asylum applications without a legal basis, leaving asylum seekers without documentation and vulnerable to frequent police stops, fines, detention, and exploitation. Asylum seekers in detention centers were sometimes unable to apply for refugee status within the prescribed time limits and had limited access to legal and other assistance. Asylum seekers had five days to appeal an order of detention or deportation; some asylum applications were rejected without written notice, depriving asylum seekers of the right to appeal.

A lack of access to qualified interpreters also hampered the full range of asylum procedures. International observers noted that while the government allocated sufficient funding for interpretation, there was a shortage of interpreters trained in some of the languages required by asylum seekers.

While prior to the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 refugee and asylum seekers totaled approximately 5,000 individuals from more than 60 countries, many had left since that time. As of July, international and domestic organizations estimated there were 1,310 persons with refugee status and 1,075 persons in need of complementary protection. In the first six months of the year, it was reported that only 55 individuals applied for asylum.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

According to census data and international Jewish groups, the Jewish population was approximately 105,000, constituting approximately 0.25 percent of the total population. According to the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities, there were approximately 300,000 persons of Jewish ancestry in the country, including President Zelenskyy.

The law defined the concept of antisemitism and established punishment for crimes motivated by antisemitism. The law also established punishment for making false or stereotypical statements regarding persons of Jewish origin, producing or disseminating materials containing antisemitic statements or content, and denying the facts of the persecution and mass killing of Jews during the Holocaust. Antisemitism was also listed as a punishable hate crime in the criminal code.

In May, the Suvorovsky District Court in Odesa sentenced a man to three years and one month of imprisonment for posting anti-Ukrainian and antisemitic comments on social media in 2022.

Authorities encountered a few incidents of antisemitism that made international news. During Hannukah celebrations in December, an unidentified individual threw a Molotov cocktail at the central synagogue in Mykolaiv, damaging the synagogue's door. The perpetrator fled the scene. Public menorahs in several cities were also toppled. In response, local police

and the SBU provided round-the-clock protection for public menorahs.