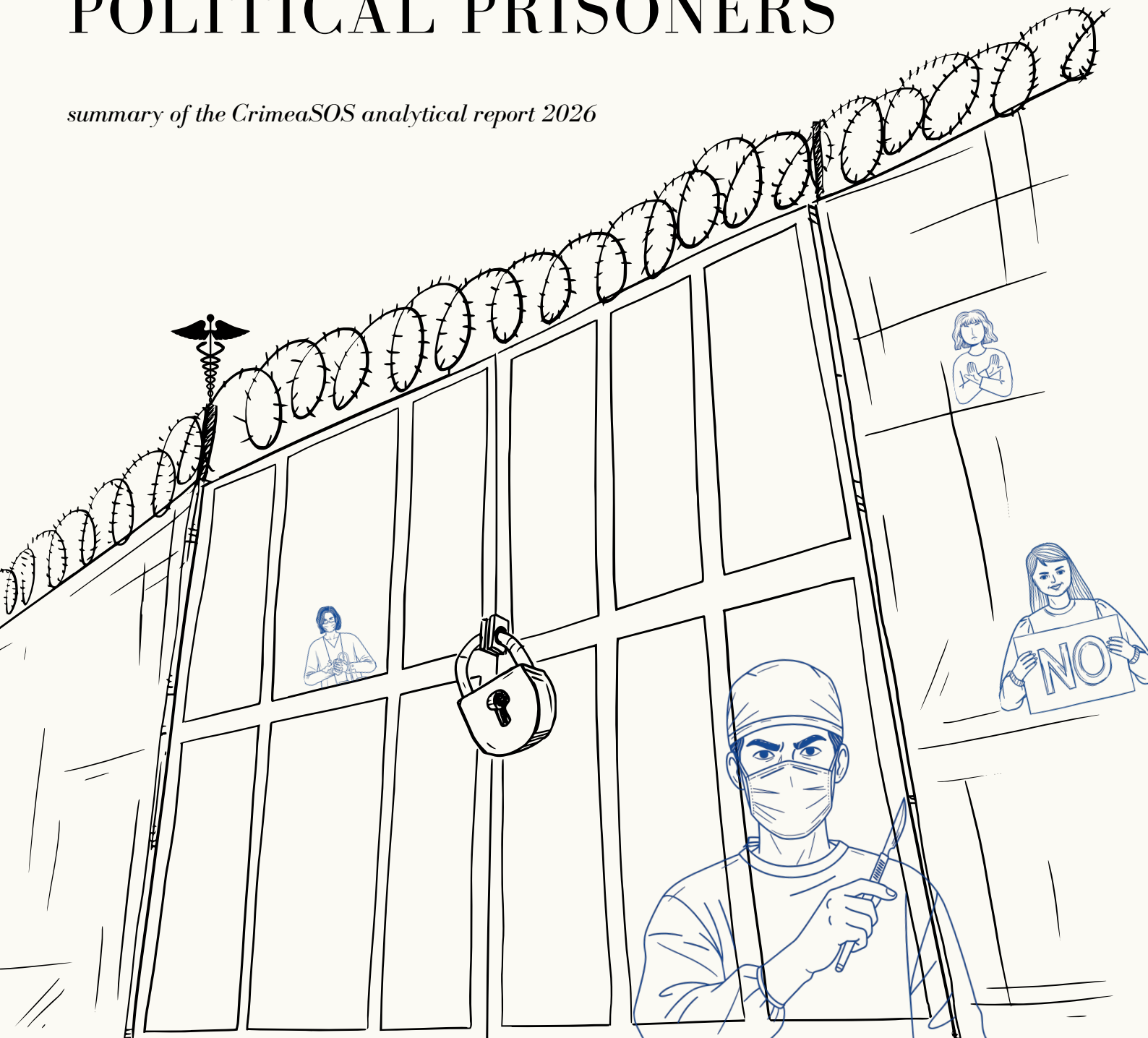


SYSTEMIC DENIAL OF MEDICAL CARE AS A TOOL OF REPRESSION AGAINST CRIMEAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

summary of the CrimeaSOS analytical report 2026



About the report

This summary and report was conducted as part of the project **“Strong Civil Society of Ukraine – a Driver Towards Reforms and Democracy.”**

At the same time, the report forms part of the broader mission and ongoing human rights work of NGO CrimeaSOS to document violations, support people affected by war and occupation, and contribute to national and international efforts to protect victims of politically motivated persecution, promote accountability, and achieve justice.

The information presented in this summary is based on the research and documentation available to CrimeaSOS at the time of preparation. The summary is intended for informational, research, advocacy, human rights monitoring, media, diplomatic, and accountability purposes.

Any decisions concerning diplomatic measures, sanctions, legal proceedings, or other forms of international action remain the responsibility of the competent authorities and institutions.

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Access to the full report



For the full version of the research, please scan the QR code or contact: hi@krymsos.com

This publication is a summary and should be read together with the full analytical report where detailed case information and supporting documentation are required.

ABOUT THE SUMMARY AND ITS USE

This publication is a summary of the analytical report “Systemic Denial of Medical Care as a Tool of Repression Against Crimean Political Prisoners.”

It provides a concise overview of the report’s key findings concerning the situation of 25 seriously ill Crimean political prisoners and the documented patterns of inadequate or denied medical care, deteriorating health conditions, and abusive detention practices.

Purpose and use

The research brings together publicly available and case-specific information concerning the health conditions and treatment of seriously ill Crimean political prisoners. It is intended to support human rights monitoring, advocacy, accountability, and international action.

The information presented in this summary and in the full report may be used, as appropriate, by:

- diplomatic missions and governments for diplomatic engagement and urgent interventions;
- international organizations and human rights institutions for monitoring and advocacy;
- researchers and civil society organizations for further investigation and advocacy;
- media;
- and relevant authorities and actors working on targeted sanctions.

What does the research demonstrate?

The research documents serious health conditions among the selected political prisoners and identifies recurring patterns in the provision or denial of medical care and detention conditions. The cases include, among others, oncological diseases, strokes, severe weight loss, hepatitis, and serious chronic conditions.

The report concludes that the documented cases indicate a systemic pattern of denial of medical care rather than isolated failures and calls for immediate international attention and intervention.

Why is this information being disseminated?

The purpose of disseminating this information is to ensure that the situation of seriously ill Crimean political prisoners is urgently communicated to international stakeholders and receives the highest possible level of attention.

The research is intended to contribute to the consolidation of international efforts aimed at:

- securing urgent attention to individual cases;
- strengthening international monitoring and diplomatic engagement;
- supporting efforts to secure the release and protection of seriously ill political prisoners;
- documenting and addressing systemic human rights violations;
- advancing accountability for those responsible; and
- supporting advocacy for targeted sanctions against individuals involved in serious violations, where the available evidence supports such action.

Introduction

The term “Crimean political prisoners,” which in contemporary human rights discourse is increasingly rendered as “Crimean political hostages” or victims of politically motivated persecution, covers citizens of Ukraine (above all Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians) unlawfully convicted by the occupying authorities of the Russian Federation. These individuals are prosecuted for acts that show no signs of violent criminal activity, and their cases are a direct consequence of their civic position, religious affiliation, or ethnic self-identification. The legal specificity of the situation lies in the systematic and unlawful application of Russian criminal legislation on occupied territory, which constitutes a gross violation of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention. The disregard for Articles 64, 66, and 76 of that Convention indicates that the occupying state intends to use the legal system not to maintain law and order, but as a mechanism for dismantling civil society.

As of April 2026, according to the Office of the President of Ukraine's Representative in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the number of political prisoners had reached 223, of whom 155 are members of the Crimean Tatar people.

Reports by international organizations, including Human Rights Watch, confirm these alarming trends, pointing to a steady rise in the number of people facing politically motivated persecution. This report focuses on documenting the 25 cases most critical in terms of health status, which vividly demonstrate a systemic pattern of torture through the denial of medical care. The sample covers cases in which detainees' medical condition has become an element of deliberate state pressure aimed at the physical and psychological exhaustion of a disloyal population.

From Fabricated Cases to Escalating Sentences

Analysis of this repressive practice reveals two main patterns of persecution. The first is directed against the Crimean Tatar community and rests on Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (terrorism charges over alleged participation in Hizb ut-Tahrir). The charges in such cases are purely declaratory in nature, since they contain no evidence of actual violence or weapons possession and rest instead on the testimony of anonymous witnesses and the mere fact of membership in a religious community. The second pattern targets pro-Ukrainian activists, journalists, and civilians, who are charged with treason (Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) or the unlawful handling of explosives, with the detention often bearing the hallmarks of an enforced disappearance.

Chronologically, the repression falls into two waves. The first wave (2016–2020) was characterized by mass group cases with sentences of up to 19 years. The second wave, which began after 2022, shows an escalation in severity and an acceleration of judicial procedures. A telling example is the case of Ali Mamutov, whose verdict was announced late in the evening on the very day of the hearing, in order to minimize media coverage. Cases from this wave show a complete degradation of procedural guarantees: courts disregard even the defendants' evident terminal conditions, turning the penitentiary system into an instrument for the slow elimination of the regime's opponents.

The Anatomy of Systemic Denial of Medical Care: Patterns and Methods

In disregard of the Nelson Mandela Rules, the Russian penitentiary system has developed an algorithm in which illness is used as a tool for managing behavior. In particular, it violates Rule 24, on the equivalence of medical care to that available in the community, and Rule 27, which requires immediate access to specialists. Instead of proper treatment for their underlying condition, prisoners receive symptomatic care (painkillers), and hospitalization is often interrupted precisely when treatment starts to show even a minimal result, rather than upon medical stabilization. This pattern is evident in the cases of Ruslan Mesutov and Yashar Shykhmetov, where the return to the colony took place in defiance of any medical logic of recovery.

Analysis of the 25 cases reveals a humanitarian crisis: at least 3 cases of oncological disease and at least 4 strokes have been documented. Weight-loss statistics point to systemic emaciation: 9 individuals show signs of critical malnutrition, with 4 of them recording losses of 22 to 30 kilograms. A separate area of concern is the epidemic spread of viral hepatitis in places of detention. Ruslan Mesutov, Ali Mamutov, and Tymur Yalkabov contracted hepatitis C directly while held in institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service, pointing to unsanitary conditions and the absence of sterile medical procedures. The dental situation in prisons such as SIZO No. 5 in Rostov-on-Don (a pre-trial detention center) or VK-17 in Murmansk (correctional colony) has left Edem Smailov and Emil Ziiadinov forced to pull out their own teeth by hand because of unbearable pain and the doctors' refusal to help.

Placing seriously ill people in ShIZO (a punishment cell), which is directly prohibited by Nelson Mandela Rules 43–46, is a widespread practice used to inflict additional physical breakdown.

Conditions of Detention for Elderly Political Prisoners (the 60+ Category)

Elderly people are the most vulnerable category under the Russian strict-regime system. A striking case is that of Volodymyr Ananiev (75), who became a target of persecution because of his active civic position — defending the rights of parishioners of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and fighting the unlawful seizure of land in Crimea. His detention in February 2024 was accompanied by three days held incommunicado and by beatings. Ananiev's clinical picture is extremely severe: progressive glaucoma in both eyes, chronic arterial hypertension, and pronounced degenerative joint disease of the lower limbs. Halyna Dovhopola (71) is serving her sentence in Vladimir Oblast, held in complete isolation from her family and exposed to extreme cold. Her case is an example of deliberate cruelty: on the day her verdict was handed down, convoy guards attempted to break three fingers on her right hand, causing severe injuries and bruising. In addition to the effects of this physical violence and frostbitten toes suffered during transfer, she has been diagnosed with progressive coxarthrosis. The refusal to provide state-funded surgery while she is held in a colony where she must move across slippery surfaces with a cane makes the winter at the Vladimir prison a critical threat to her survival.

Servet Haziiev's (66) condition worsened after a minor stroke in 2021 that caused facial paralysis and impaired coordination. Instead of rehabilitation, he was beaten by guards at Hospital No. 19 in Rostov-on-Don for refusing to vote during the Russian elections. Azamat Eiupov (63) has suffered four ischemic strokes directly in places of detention. A systemic diagnostic failure was recorded in a SIZO, where a paramedic, instead of recognizing the signs of an acute cerebrovascular event, diagnosed "osteochondrosis" and sent the paralyzed man back to his cell.

Although Ruslan Mesutov is only 59, we have included him in the priority group because of signs of accelerated aging of the cardiovascular system caused by systematic torture. In a ShIZO in Yakutsk, he was subjected to the standard punishment for demanding medical transparency: after asking for his test results, he was locked in the isolation unit, where he was forced to remain on his feet for 16 hours a day. This caused the veins in his legs to rupture and led to recurring loss of consciousness from heart pain.

Transfers (Etap)

The process of transporting prisoners functions as an independent form of ill-treatment. The logistics involve overcrowded prison vans with no climate control and rail cars with limited access to water and sanitation. The practice of "extremely long-distance transfer," covering 8,000 to 13,000 kilometers (Yakutia, Kamchatka, Murmansk), is aimed at completely severing ties with family and lawyers. Servet Haziiev endured a 12,700-kilometer transfer to Kamchatka, which seriously undermined his health even before he reached the colony.

An additional element of pressure during transfer is the "profuchet" (an internal departmental "watch-list" status) status imposed on most political prisoners. This legitimizes sleep deprivation as torture, with the prisoner woken every two hours at night for a "check," which, combined with a transfer lasting many weeks, leads to profound psychophysical exhaustion.

Manipulation of Government Resolution No. 54 and the Release of the Seriously Ill

Russian law includes Government Resolution No. 54 of 6 February 2004, which formally provides for release on health grounds. In the cases of Crimean prisoners, however, this instrument has become an object of manipulation. The tragic "release-and-return" pattern is illustrated by the cases of Lenur Khalilov (metastatic liver cancer) and Oleksandr Sizikov (total blindness). Both were released by courts of first instance, but the prosecutor's office subsequently appealed these decisions, justifying the return of people in critical health to prison on the grounds of their "particular danger." Khalilov was forcibly taken from his home and transferred to Arkhangelsk region, despite being in the terminal stage of his illness.

This manipulation is also evident in the case of Yashar Shykhmetov, where the judge disregarded a medical commission's finding that release was necessary, relying instead on contrived disciplinary sanctions.

This shows that law within the occupation system is merely an illusion: decisions over life and death are made not on the basis of medical diagnoses, but in line with the political directives of the prosecutor's office and the security services, which take priority over humanitarian considerations.

Critical Cases

The condition of many individuals in the sample is critical. **Tofik Abdulgaziev** suffers from a brain tumor, tuberculosis, and diabetes (a blood sugar level of 26). His condition is compounded by near-total blindness and psychological pressure: in February 2026, he was forced to sign medical documents whose contents he could not read, which turned out to be a waiver of any claims against the administration. **Amet Suleimanov**, despite his heart defect, has for years been denied surgery in Moscow, while **Iryna Danylovych**, following a minor stroke, is held under conditions of acoustic torture (loud Russian music played in the barracks), which has left her completely deaf in one ear.

A distinct place is occupied by the case of **Volodymyr Yakymenko**, who is being forced into forced labor, sewing uniforms for the Russian army for 12 rubles a month (roughly 12 euro cents). Yakymenko is subjected to constant ethnically motivated insults (“Bandera,” “Nazi”) and to physical violence. **The systemic disregard of symptoms has already led to the deaths of Dzhemil Gafarov, Kostiantyn Shiring, and Rustem Virati. Amethan Abdulvapov** suffered a stroke immediately after being severely beaten by guards, as confirmed by his father's testimony.

The case of **Yunus Masharipov** illustrates the use of punitive psychiatry and an incommunicado regime that rules out any possibility of external oversight of a prisoner's condition.

Religious and Ethnic Discrimination in Places of Detention

For Crimean Tatars, places of detention become an arena of double discrimination. The performance of namaz is systematically treated as a violation of internal order (the cases of Edem Smailov and Emil Ziiadinov), providing grounds for placement in punishment cells. The administrations of colonies such as Verkhneuralsk Prison impose a pork-containing ration, forcing Muslims to go hungry. Forced shaving of beards and the confiscation of religious literature (a Quran, in the case of Ruslan Mesutov) are further methods of degrading a person's dignity.

Combined with illness, these practices create an unbearable cumulative effect. Fasting driven by religious conviction, against a backdrop of no dietary meals being provided, leads to flare-ups of ulcers and pyelonephritis.

Conclusions and Strategic Recommendations for the International Community

The facts uncovered confirm that the denial of medical care to Crimean political prisoners is a centralized system of state terror, in which the medical service of the Federal Penitentiary Service is integrated into the punitive apparatus. The identical nature of the algorithm across different regions of Russia, from Murmansk to Yakutia, demonstrates the systemic character of the violations of Article 3 of the ECHR and of the Nelson Mandela Rules. The situation calls for immediate international intervention, given the high likelihood of further deaths in 2026/27.

As for recommendations for Ukraine, the immediate priority is to give priority inclusion to seriously ill individuals on humanitarian exchange lists, regardless of the formal charges against them. The state should strengthen financial and legal support for hostages' families and for the lawyers working in high-risk areas.

At the same time, at the level of international institutions, the ICRC must be asked to urgently monitor specific facilities, such as VK-17, VK-1, and SIZO-1 in Rostov, introducing individually named reporting on each prisoner's state of health and verifying compliance with Rules 24 and 27 on access to specialists. In addition, the international community should launch an investigation into the practice of overturning court decisions on release on health grounds, as a distinct form of inhuman treatment.

With respect to partner states, it is critically important to introduce personal sanctions against the judges of the Southern District Military Court and against Federal Penitentiary Service leadership implicated in specific cases. Sanctions pressure should be applied by name and should extend not only to senior leadership, but also to the heads of medical units and to the supervising prosecutors who block hospitalization.

There is a need to move to a format of “urgent diplomacy,” in which every court hearing concerning sick prisoners is accompanied by public statements from international leaders. In this situation, time is a critical resource.



About NGO CrimeaSOS

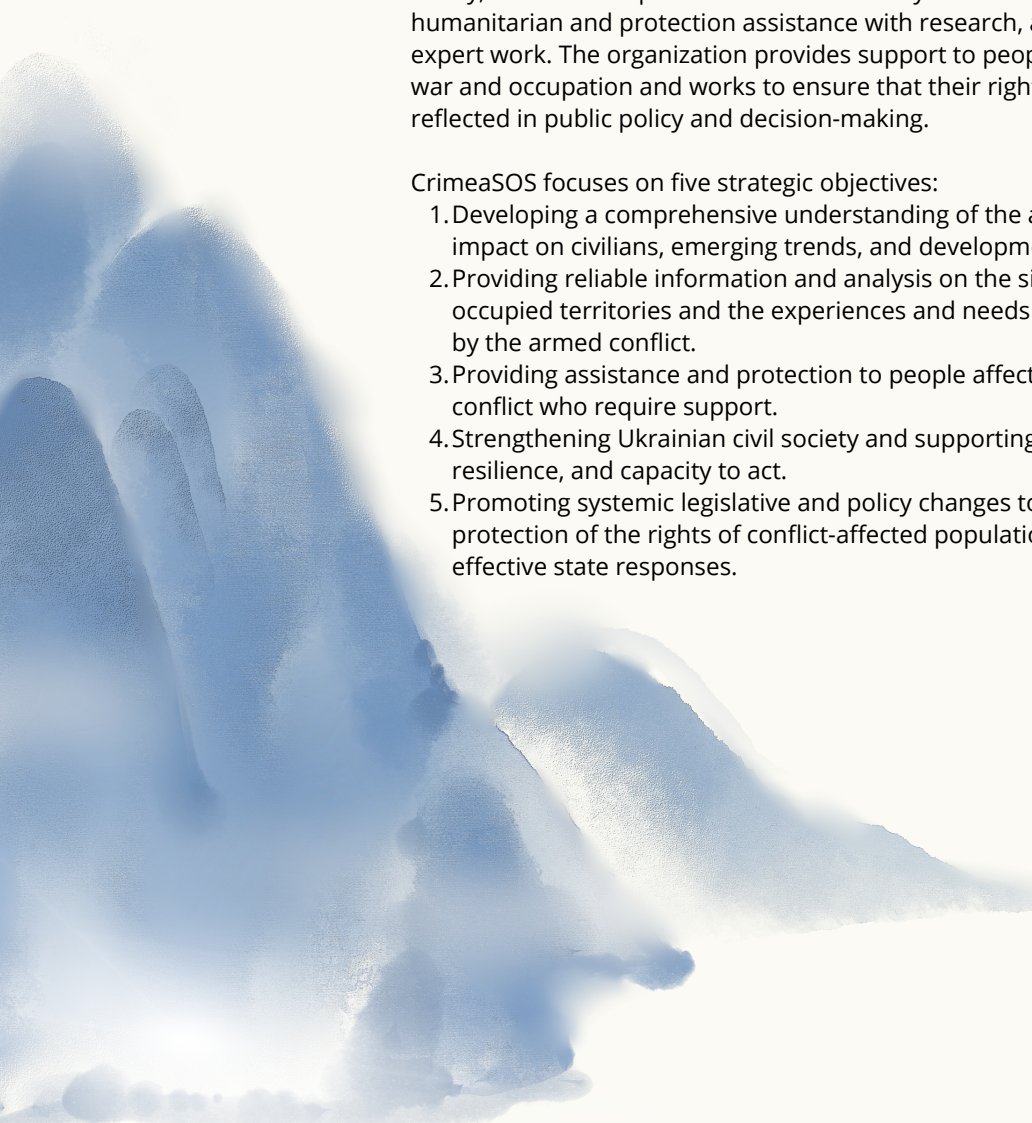
CrimeaSOS is a non-governmental, non-political organization working to raise awareness of Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea and the systematic repression of Crimean residents. We work to strengthen connections between Crimea and mainland Ukraine and to promote the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other people affected by Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

CrimeaSOS envisions an integrated, democratic, and progressive Ukraine with an active, responsible, and strong civil society based on the principles of solidarity.

CrimeaSOS was founded by a group of civic activists on February 27, 2014, the first day of Russia's occupation of Crimea. It began as a Facebook page providing timely and reliable information about the situation on the peninsula. Over time, the initiative evolved into an established expert organization working on issues related to occupied Crimea, IDPs, and people affected by the armed conflict.

Today, CrimeaSOS operates from offices in Kyiv and Kherson and combines humanitarian and protection assistance with research, advocacy, and expert work. The organization provides support to people affected by the war and occupation and works to ensure that their rights and needs are reflected in public policy and decision-making.

CrimeaSOS focuses on five strategic objectives:

1. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the armed conflict — its impact on civilians, emerging trends, and developments.
 2. Providing reliable information and analysis on the situation in the occupied territories and the experiences and needs of people affected by the armed conflict.
 3. Providing assistance and protection to people affected by the armed conflict who require support.
 4. Strengthening Ukrainian civil society and supporting its development, resilience, and capacity to act.
 5. Promoting systemic legislative and policy changes to strengthen the protection of the rights of conflict-affected populations and ensure effective state responses.
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