

STATEMENT
of National and International, Humanitarian and Human Rights
Organisations on
Building Back Better:
Unlocking the Recovery Potential through Guaranteeing Rights and
Inclusion of Ukrainians in Temporarily Occupied Territories
(URC2025, Rome, July 10-11)

The recovery of Ukraine is, first and foremost, the restoration of human dignity and human rights. The unjust war waged by the Russian Federation has resulted, among its numerous grave consequences, in the occupation of parts of Ukraine's sovereign territory along with the Ukrainian citizens residing there. According to various estimates, this affects between 3 to 5 million people, including over one million children, who currently reside in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine (TOT). Despite the Russian Federation's unlawful temporary occupation of these territories, the atmosphere of fear created through crimes against civilians, and the forced imposition of Russian citizenship, all these individuals remain Ukrainian citizens. These citizens, despite being subjected to systemic violations and enforced isolation, constitute a vital component of Ukraine's demographic and socioeconomic future.

Russia continues to pursue a deliberate and systematic policy aimed at dismantling the civic identity and future of Ukrainian citizens residing in the TOT. Practices such as forced passportisation, deportations, filtration procedures, unlawful detentions, property expropriations, and mass displacement represent serious and ongoing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. These are not isolated occurrences but are integral components of a broader strategy of demographic engineering and cultural erasure, as consistently documented by civil society organisations and international monitoring bodies.

In the TOT of Ukraine, children from an early age and youth are exposed to state-sponsored militarisation and indoctrination initiatives implemented by the occupying authorities. These practices aim to suppress Ukrainian identity, cultivate loyalty to the Russian Federation, and expand its influence, thereby undermining the long-term prospects for reintegration and reconciliation.

We must reaffirm that Ukrainians living under occupation are not abandoned; they remain citizens of Ukraine, and any effort toward national reconstruction must consider their rights, needs, and inclusion. National recovery must not be limited by geography but be guided by the principle of inclusive justice.

Ukrainians in the TOT are a Strategic Human Capital for Ukrainian Recovery. The population residing in the TOT, and in particular the youth, represent a strategically significant reserve of human capital for Ukraine's long-term recovery and development. Their potential must not be

underestimated. The establishment of comprehensive mechanisms for their equitable reintegration is not only a legal and humanitarian imperative but a prerequisite for ensuring demographic sustainability and reinforcing national unity. Structured investments in education, psychosocial support, housing, and the development of clearly defined approaches for recognising and valuing professional or educational experience acquired through occupation will serve as critical enablers of recovery and social cohesion.

Sustaining ties with Ukrainian citizens under occupation requires deliberate, inclusive policies that acknowledge their lived realities and resilience. In the face of efforts to erase their Ukrainian identity, rebuilding must prioritise these people –not marginalise them –placing their protection and participation at the centre of national recovery. The weakening or disruption of these ties is the outcome of a deliberate policy pursued by the Russian Federation. Accordingly, Ukraine must undertake all possible measures to reinforce its engagement with the citizens residing in the TOT. At the same time, it is essential to consider the specific implications of the prolonged occupation of certain parts of Ukraine’s territory – most notably, the more than decade-long occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk Regions.

For persons residing in temporarily occupied territories, there must be clear legal frameworks and official recognition of their experiences and lived realities under occupation. This policy architecture in the TOT includes the imposition of Russian legal and administrative frameworks, the dismantling of Ukrainian institutions, widespread surveillance of civilians, and the criminalisation of pro-Ukrainian sentiment, language, and identity. Such systemic violations not only constitute international crimes but also pose significant obstacles to future reintegration and social cohesion. To address these challenges and ensure the long-term restoration of legal certainty and national unity, the Government of Ukraine must implement a comprehensive administrative procedure for recognising civil status acts that occurred under occupation, such as births, deaths, and marriages. In parallel, robust legal mechanisms must be established to validate and utilise information contained in essential documents issued under occupation, including medical records, employment histories, education certificates, property titles, disability documentation, etc.

Justice and the aggressor’s accountability must serve as the bedrock of Ukraine’s recovery and any sustainable vision for lasting peace. *Building Back Better* requires not only the reconstruction of infrastructure but the restoration of truth, dignity, and legal redress for all those affected by the war. The Russian

Federation must be held fully accountable for the grave breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights law it has committed, as well as for the widespread destruction inflicted upon Ukraine's territory, population, and institutions. A comprehensive system of full reparations for damages—including restitution, compensation, and guarantees of non-repetition—must be embedded as a cornerstone of Ukraine's sustainable development strategy. Human rights considerations must be mainstreamed into all future negotiations. Any peace or ceasefire process must explicitly affirm the rights of Ukrainian citizens residing in the TOT and must compel the aggressor state to provide unhindered humanitarian access, cease all forms of persecution and comply fully with its obligations under international law.

The rights of people affected by the war must be fully protected, and the damage they have endured must be acknowledged and remedied. Both national and international compensation mechanisms must explicitly incorporate losses incurred by residents of the TOT since 2014, ensuring they are eligible for both property and non-material reparations through Ukraine's national framework and the Register of Damage for Ukraine (RD4U). It is imperative that Ukraine's legal and policy frameworks address the risks posed by forcibly imposed Russian citizenship in the TOT. The urgent need to preserve and protect the Ukrainian legal identity of affected populations requires explicit safeguards in national legislation. This includes proactive policies to prevent future discrimination or statelessness.

In the context of the ongoing occupation, it is essential to prioritise and facilitate the safe and dignified evacuation pathways of residents of the TOT. At least [1 million people](#) living under occupation are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, cut off from aid due to the Russian Federation's systematic denial of access and suppression of monitoring mechanisms. This has created a severe protection vacuum, exposing civilians—including children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities—to violence, exploitation, persecution and denial of essential services. Urgent, coordinated action is needed to establish secure humanitarian corridors and deliver legal, social, and logistical support to evacuees upon arrival in Ukraine's government-controlled areas. Humanitarian actors must be granted immediate and unhindered access, while the international community must intensify pressure to end obstruction and ensure the accountability of the aggressor for violations of international law.

A comprehensive system for the reintegration of residents of the TOT must be established for their full inclusion in social, economic and civic life. To enable equitable participation in Ukraine's recovery for residents of the TOT, it is essential to adopt sufficiently funded and strategically coordinated reintegration policies. These policies should guarantee unhindered access to the national social protection and pension systems, ensure the availability of

affordable and adequate housing, and provide reskilling, vocational training, and employment opportunities tailored to conflict-affected populations.

IDP Councils must be recognised as vital partners in Ukraine's recovery. Formed by displaced persons themselves—many of whom fled the TOT — these councils represent a unique civic infrastructure rooted in lived experience, local legitimacy, and democratic participation. They serve as a critical bridge between government institutions, displaced and host communities, ensuring that recovery policies reflect real needs and uphold human rights. IDP Councils foster trust, strengthen social cohesion, and help reconstruct inclusive local governance from the ground up. Their systematic exclusion from national and international recovery planning not only undermines legitimacy but also wastes an extraordinary source of knowledge, leadership, and resilience. To build a sustainable and just recovery, Ukraine must embed IDP Councils into the very architecture of planning, implementation, and oversight.

Transitional justice must be recognised as a foundation pillar of Ukraine's national recovery and reconciliation strategy. Without a clear, state-led framework to address the devastating consequences of war, there can be no sustainable peace, no true accountability of the aggressor state, and no meaningful reintegration. While civil society has led important efforts in advancing transitional justice, the continued absence of a coherent national strategy risks leaving deep accountability gaps, fueling social fragmentation, and delaying reconciliation. Ukraine must urgently establish a permanent, legally mandated, and adequately resourced public authority responsible for TOT policy, reintegration, long-term strategic planning and inter-ministerial coordination, ensuring that justice is not an afterthought but a central dimension of national recovery.

As the international community gathers in Rome for URC 2025, we call for a strategic shift in recovery discourse and implementation - one that recognises the population of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine as essential human capital, whose inclusion is indispensable to Ukraine's recovery, resilience, and long-term renewal.

We, national and international, humanitarian and human rights organisations, urge the following:

To International Donors and Multilateral Partners:

- Integrate the needs of residents of the TOT across all pillars of reconstruction—from infrastructure and housing to healthcare, education, livelihoods, psychosocial support, ensuring donor-funded programs, projects and budget allocations that explicitly address displaced populations and those still residing in occupied territories.

- Prioritise funding for documentation of violations, transitional justice mechanisms, reintegration services, and safe relocation pathways for

Ukrainians in the TOT, in coordination with the Ukrainian government, civil society and local authorities.

- Promote the inclusion of both property and non-property losses, as well as human rights violations, in international compensation frameworks—starting from 2014—to ensure fair, comprehensive, and rights-based redress for all victims of Russian aggression, particularly those residing in or displaced from the TOT.

- Facilitate the establishment of humanitarian corridors and independent monitoring mechanisms, and support the systematic documentation of human rights and international humanitarian law violations in the TOT to ensure legal accountability, humanitarian access, and protective guarantees for civilians residing under occupation.

- Recognise and empower IDP Councils as vital drivers of Ukraine's recovery by investing in their institutional development, strengthening their capacity, and ensuring their formal inclusion in local and national planning, so that displaced communities from the TOT can actively shape recovery and development efforts.

To the Government of Ukraine:

- Institutionalise transitional justice as a national policy priority by establishing a permanent, legally mandated, and adequately resourced public authority responsible for TOT policy, reintegration, and civilian engagement, ensuring long-term strategic planning and inter-ministerial coordination.

- Develop and operationalise a national data collection and monitoring system to document rights violations in the TOT and guide evidence-based, needs-oriented policy and programmatic responses.

- Adopt simplified and retroactive legal procedure for the administrative recognition of civil status acts, including births, deaths, marriages, as well as educational and employment histories, disability status, and property rights of individuals affected by occupation.

- Safeguard Ukrainian citizenship by explicitly addressing the consequences of coerced passportisation and ensuring protection against statelessness, exclusion, or administrative discrimination.

- Expand opportunities for youth from the TOT by improving access to higher education, vocational training, and supporting youth-led initiatives and mentorship programs that promote reintegration and counter disinformation.

- Enable comprehensive socioeconomic reintegration by ensuring equal access for residents of the TOT and returnees to the national social protection and pension systems, affordable housing, employment support, and safe, dignified relocation pathways to government-controlled areas.

- Ensure access to national compensation mechanisms for the residents of the TOT by conducting systematic and inclusive documentation of property losses, non-property damages, and rights violations resulting from the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, dating back to 2014.

The Ukraine Recovery Conference 2025 must be a turning point in how we define recovery—not just by kilometers of brand-new roads or megawatts of restored energy, but by the human stories behind every repaired home, every preserved school, and every family that remains in temporarily occupied territories or was forced to leave their home.

True recovery means rebuilding not just what was lost, but restoring what makes Ukraine whole: its people, including those enduring occupation.

Let us not allow any roadmap for reconstruction to move forward without a clear commitment to the rights, needs, and future of every Ukrainian, regardless of where they reside today.

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Donbas SOS, Non-Governmental Organisation
Human Rights Centre ZMINA
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GROUP OF INFLUENCE, Civil Holding
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