

Analytical material
**Behind closed doors: the fate of
residents of psychoneurological
boarding institutions in the
temporarily occupied territory
of the Zaporizhzhia region**





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More than 930 residents of psychoneurological establishments and geriatric nursing homes in the temporarily occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region, including elderly individuals and people with disabilities, have lived under Russian occupation for over three years. Unable to evacuate, they now rely entirely on the occupation administration.

Residents of psychoneurological institutions in the temporarily occupied part of Zaporizhzhia region face severe coercion and deprivation. They are forced to paint Russian tricolors, sing the Russian anthem, and publicly thank Putin. Participation in propaganda events and adoption of a Russian identity are mandatory. Without a Russian passport, they must comply to receive medical care and social benefits, leaving them no alternative for survival.

A system of coercion, control, and propaganda – contrary to the Geneva Conventions – traps Ukrainians isolated in institutions as hostages of the occupation, despite the ostentatious “care” and televised reports of “successes” and “renewal” under the Russian flag.

The following article examines how the boarding establishments have changed under Russian control and describes current conditions.

Boarding homes in the Zaporizhzhia region before the Russian occupation

Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, ten social protection institutions operated in the Zaporizhzhia region: seven psychoneurological boarding homes, two geriatric nursing homes, and one children's boarding school. About 2,400 people with disabilities and older adults lived there. In Ukraine, such institutions remain the largest providers of inpatient care services. Because of the lack of quality and affordable community services, the inability or unwillingness of relatives to support these people, and the difficult economic situation, boarding establishments have become the last resort for thousands of people with disabilities and older adults.

In the early days of the invasion, some of these institutions came under Russian occupation – the Mykhailivskiy, Preslavskiy, and Orlivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishments, as well as the Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home. According to 2022 reports, there were 1,013 residents in these four institutions at the time.

The village of Preslav in the Primorsk community of the Berdyansk district had the largest psychoneurological boarding establishment in the region. The facility had four residential buildings designed for 340 residents and was considered one of the best equipped in the Zaporizhzhia region in terms of living conditions. The staff consisted of 173.5 members, including more than 100 medical personnel: doctors, nurses, and junior specialists. Medical care was provided in-house. According to the Department of Social Protection of the Population of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration, as of September 1, 2022, 319 people were living in the boarding home, which was nearly at full capacity.



Preslavskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment before the full-scale Russian invasion
Photo: Department of Social Protection of the Population of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration



Preslavskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment before the full-scale Russian invasion
Photo: Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration

The Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment was located in the village of Pokazne, Mykhailivskiy District. The boarding home had a staff of over 150 employees, including about 60 medical personnel who provided basic care and support. According to the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration’s Department of Social Protection, as of August 1, 2022, 259 residents were living in the boarding home.



Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment before the full-scale Russian invasion

Photo: Zaporizhzhia Regional Council



The Orlivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment was located in the village of Orlove, Melitopol District. The facility was designed to accommodate 200 residents, predominantly male, and comprised multiple departments, including assisted living, a specialized wing for residents with limited mobility, and a women’s department. The boarding establishment had a staff of approximately 120 employees, including more than 20 medical professionals. According to the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration’s Department of Social Protection, as of 1 September 2022, the boarding home had 191 residents.



Orlivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment before the full-scale Russian invasion

Photo: Department of Social Protection of the Population of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration



The Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home is a substantial facility designed to accommodate 300 residents. The complex comprised a primary dormitory building and multiple auxiliary structures distributed over a substantial expanse. As of 1 May 2022, the population of the nursing home stood at 244.



Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home before the full-scale Russian invasion.
Photo: Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration

Prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, institutional facilities in the Zaporizhzhia region were operating in accordance with their usual routines. Despite their continued significance within the social protection system, a restructuring process was imminent as part of the broader deinstitutionalization agenda. This restructuring would have enabled a substantial proportion of the residents to embark on a journey towards independent living within communities.

It is evident that certain institutions required refurbishment; however, their clients were able to access fundamental care and medical assistance within these facilities. Moreover, they were assured of protection and support from the National Preventive Mechanism, the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, other state authorities, and civil society organizations in Ukraine.

However, in February 2022, a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine resulted in the complete disconnection of several thousand residents of institutions from the Ukrainian social protection system, justice, and the rule of law.

Life under the tricolor: how the occupation authorities established control over boarding establishments and turned their residents into hostages

The Russian occupation has had a profoundly detrimental impact on individuals living with disabilities and the elderly residing in boarding homes in the Zaporizhzhia region. The evacuation of civilians was rendered unfeasible due to the expeditious nature of the Russian offensive, which precluded the establishment of designated humanitarian corridors. The boarding establishments that were located within the occupied territory were swiftly placed under Russian administration. The structures were undamaged, and the institutions maintained their operations.

The directors of two institutions – Yevgen Rupchev of the Preslavskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment and Tamara Vereshchagina of the Orlivskiy Boarding Establishment – consented to collaborate with the occupation authorities. Subsequent to this, the Ukrainian side lost contact with the institutions, and no official information about the activities of the institutions, and most importantly, about the condition, needs, and fate of the people who were in them, was received.

Following the occupation, Yevgen Rupchev became an active participant in the dissemination of Russian propaganda. In September 2023, he was elected to the Prymorsky District Council from the United Russia party. He was granted the status of “deputy” and became a member of the commissions on budget issues and “legality and deputy ethics.” In 2024, Rupchev recorded a video message in which he called on residents of the occupied territories to participate in the illegal “elections” of the head of the Russian Federation. In 2025, the Berdyansk District Prosecutor’s Office submitted an indictment to the court, alleging human trafficking and collaborationist crimes. Since April of this year, the Vilnyansky District Court has been hearing a case concerning the voluntary assumption of office in illegal authorities.



Director of the Preslavskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment, Yevgen Rupchev

Photo from Russian propaganda media

It is also noteworthy that the director of the Orlivskiy Boarding Establishment, Tamara Vereshchagina, participated in propaganda activities. In her discourse, she expressed gratitude to the Russian administration and Vladimir Putin, stating that Russia's presence was a long-awaited occurrence. An investigation is currently underway against Vereshchagina, who stands accused of collaborating with the occupation authorities. In September 2025, the Komunarsky District Court of Zaporizhzhia [published](#) the court summons of the aforementioned individual, and a preliminary hearing was scheduled for early November.



Tamara Vereshchagina, Director of the Orlivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment

Photo: Department of Social Protection of the Population of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration

Repression, abduction and survival: a case study

Following the capture of the village of Pokazne by Russian troops, the Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment was swiftly placed under their control. During the initial weeks of the occupation, the Russian forces began to exert pressure on the institution's staff. Vitaliy Ponomarenko, the acting director, was abducted, held for a period of three days, and compelled to collaborate with the authorities. However, he refused, and the occupiers accused him of "discrediting the Russian Federation" and deported him to territory controlled by Ukraine.



Russian occupiers deported Vitaliy Ponomarenko, acting director of the Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment

Photo from the Russian propaganda media

According to the Department of Social Protection of the Population of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Civilian Administration, following this, V. Ponomarenko, in conjunction with approximately one dozen former employees of the boarding establishment who also refused to cooperate, found employment in this Department. In general, the institution was left without a significant part of its pre-war staff. It is regrettable that the available documentation provides no insight into the repercussions of the aforementioned situation for the residents of the boarding establishment, nor does it offer any information on the quality of the services and support they received.

To replace the Ukrainian leadership, the occupation authorities appointed Vladislav Stolyarenko, a Russian citizen from the Krasnodar region, as the establishment's director. In July 2023, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine reported that the occupiers had taken the residents of the boarding home to an unknown location. This was one of the largest deportations of civilians from social institutions in the occupied territory. The remaining employees were then dismissed. According to the information provided by the General Staff, the Russians had planned to establish a military hospital on the site of the boarding establishment.

Behind closed doors: the fate of residents of psychoneurological boarding institutions in the temporarily occupied territory of the Zaporizhzhia region



In 2023, the invaders took the residents of the boarding establishment to an unknown location, explaining that it was an “evacuation due to shelling.”

Photo from Russian propaganda media

Two months later, the residents were returned, and the facility resumed operations under the control of the occupation administration. In comments to Russian media, V. Stolyarenko termed the relocation an “evacuation due to shelling” and confirmed that the individuals had been temporarily accommodated in alternative boarding facilities in the Zaporizhzhia region. However, the details of this transfer, the conditions in which they were held, and the attitude of the Russians and collaborators towards these people remain unknown.



Vladyslav Stolyarenko, the recently appointed “director” of the Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment

Photo from Russian propaganda media

During the hostilities, Berdyansk experienced a disruption to its gas supply, which had a significant impact on the local geriatric nursing home. Gas supply was only resumed in November 2022, at which point residents were able to resume normal living conditions, with access to heating and hot water, and the capacity to prepare food.

Anatoliy Shepel, the facility's head, declined to collaborate with the occupiers, which resulted in his abduction from his workplace. The man was detained in the Penal Colony No. 77, a facility that had become one of the largest torture chambers in the occupied territory. It is understood that dozens of kidnapped heads of institutions and enterprises were detained there, and that a significant number of these individuals were subjected to torture. According to local media reports, A. Shepel suffered from significant heart issues and required ongoing medical care. His wife confirmed that the occupiers removed his medication, and all efforts to secure his release were unsuccessful. The subsequent fate of Anatoliy Shepel remains uncertain.

Following the removal of the legitimate Ukrainian leadership, the occupiers appointed a new director, Olena Katrych, who agreed to cooperate with the Russians.

In the propaganda narrative disseminated by the occupation authorities, O. Katrych asserts her long-standing presence at the establishment, dating back to the inception of the so-called Special Military Operation (SVO). She alleges that the previous Ukrainian management had absconded, abandoning the facility without provision of support. At the same time, she concealed the fact that Russian troops were shelling evacuation routes and refusing to provide "green corridors," as well as the fact that Ukrainian managers and employees who refused to betray their beliefs and Ukraine were subjected to repression. She asserted that the medicine and food warehouses were empty at the time, and she declined to hold Russia responsible for the situation that had arisen, including the failure to allow humanitarian cargo to pass. According to her, after the boarding home was "registered" in the Russian system, it enabled the resumption of supplies and facility operations. She stated that improvements began only after the establishment of a pro-Russian collaborationist government, but she provided no evidence to support her claim. The level of support, quality of services, and basic attitude towards people with disabilities and older people in institutions that remain under Russian occupation are not yet known.

Investigators from the Berdyansk District Police Department informed O. Katrych that she was suspected of collaboration. According to the investigation, during the occupation, she joined the United Russia party, participated in so-called elections, introduced Russian standards, and forced staff to obtain Russian passports. Residents reported that department heads were tasked with compiling lists of individuals who had declined to accept Russian citizenship.



Olena Katrych, the recently appointed “director” of the Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home

Photo from Russian propaganda media

Some residents have voluntarily vacated the occupied territory. As the boarding establishment did not have the status of a closed facility, some were able to depart for areas under Ukrainian control or abroad. However, for people with limited mobility or those who require constant outside support, independent evacuation was not a possibility, and they were obliged to remain under the control of the occupying authorities.

During the initial months following the occupation, all boarding establishments in the region experienced a disruption to their supply of Ukrainian goods and services. Volunteers and the Ukrainian authorities attempted to deliver food and medicine, but from the fall of 2022, the occupiers completely blocked all supplies. Those who chose to remain in their posts were required to accept Russian citizenship to maintain their employment.

In the current circumstances, people are compelled to accept the citizenship of the aggressor country to access healthcare and social support, as without Russian documentation, it is impossible to obtain them.

Demonstrative care: how occupation authorities cover up crimes with fake prosperity

According to occupation sources, as of 2025, there are approximately 936 residents in four community boarding facilities remaining in the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia region.

- Preslavskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment – 218 residents and 155 employees (as of early 2025).
- Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment – 302 residents and over 200 employees (as of December 2025).
- Orlivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment – 179 residents, including 150 men and 29 women (as of July 2025).
- Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home – 237 residents and 183 employees (as of April 2025). According to information as of November 2024, 16 of them are over 90 years old.

The occupation authorities have announced plans for “improvements” and “renovations” of boarding facilities under the Russian flag. Concurrently, media outlets frequently showcase advancements that occurred prior to the arrival of the invaders, portraying them as the outcome of “new care.” Stories showcasing renovated rooms, gifts, or visits by officials are designed to create the illusion that life for those in care has improved since the occupation thanks to “Russia’s help” and that all previous problems were the result of “Ukraine’s inaction.” The occupiers’ focus is on day-to-day issues rather than on the human rights, needs, and interests of those under their control.

The Russian occupation authorities have a systematic approach to the topic of humanitarian aid, intending to create a positive image. Local media outlets have repeatedly documented how representatives of the occupation administration, the United Russia party, or Russian regions, which have been instructed by the Kremlin to “cooperate” with the occupied communities to the fullest extent, deliver food, household appliances, or gifts to boarding establishments.

Each event is meticulously documented, with leaders and subordinates compelled to publicly express gratitude to the “liberators,” demonstrating a conspicuous display of “gratitude.” These actions are intended to demonstrate the “care” of the occupation authorities, who supposedly care for their subordinates better than Ukraine. In propaganda, this is accompanied by rhetoric about the “unity of the Russian people” and is used to justify the occupation. Such actions can be perceived as humiliating for people with disabilities who find themselves dependent on occupation authorities and are compelled to take part in “gratitude performances,” which often entail a sense of desperation as they seek basic necessities such as food and medicine.



Russian media has been consistently showcasing the delivery of humanitarian aid to boarding establishments by the occupation authorities, the United Russia party, and regional authorities, to project a positive image of the occupying power

Boarding home residents as instruments of the “Russian world:” underlying motives behind Russian “care”

Since the beginning of the occupation, Russian authorities have used boarding home residents for political and propaganda purposes.

In September 2022, Russian media involved residents of the Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home in a staged referendum regarding the “annexation” of the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region to the Russian Federation. Propagandists filmed videos in which residents allegedly expressed support for “reunification with Russia” and actively voted.

The occupation authorities are systematically holding events in institutions that are saturated with Russian symbols. Residents are obliged to participate in the celebrations of so-called “National Unity Day,” “Russia Day,” “Victory Day,” “Constitution Day of the Russian Federation,” and other pseudo-state holidays. People with disabilities, elderly residents, and people with mental or intellectual disabilities are coerced into taking photos with tricolor flags, drawing Russian military equipment, flags, and soldiers, and making souvenirs for the occupiers. They are required to sing the Russian national anthem, Russian patriotic songs, and recite poems glorifying Russia.

The occupiers refer to these actions as “patriotic education,” however, their true objective is to impose the ideas of the “Russian world” on individuals residing in institutions and to shape a Russian identity.



In September 2022, Russian propaganda media exploited residents of the Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home during a staged referendum regarding the annexation of occupied territories in the Zaporizhzhia Region to the Russian Federation.

Photo from Russian propaganda media

A telling example is the Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Home, where “Russia Day” was celebrated in June 2024. For people with mental or intellectual disabilities who require constant care, a drawing competition was organized on the asphalt, accompanied by patriotic songs, the raising of the Russian flag, the singing of the anthem, and lectures on the “history of the holiday.” The building was decorated with stickers reading “I love Russia” and “We are Russians,” and residents were photographed with tricolor flags for propaganda purposes. Despite Russia’s formal participation in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, its actions in the occupied territories indicate a paternalistic stance towards people with disabilities. The decision to compel adults to take part in children’s games and competitions that are overtly humiliating once again demonstrates the occupiers’ disregard for human rights, dignity, and honour.



Residents of the Orlovskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment during the celebration of “National Unity Day,” November 2024

Photo from Russian propaganda media

Residents of occupied boarding establishments are also involved in excursions with a propaganda slant. In August 2025, residents of the Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home were taken to the Berdyansk Local History Museum. The delegation was treated to a theatrical performance of “Three Great Saviours,” a tour of an exhibition of national costumes, and a program called “The Amazing World of the Northern Azov Region.” During such events, people are presented with a distorted version of history, in which Ukrainian culture is presented as part of the “great Russian heritage.” Russian traditions and symbols are portrayed as an integral part of local identity, with such visits serving as a tool for spreading ideological narratives.



Residents of the Mykhailivskyi Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment during the celebration of “Russia Day,” June 2024

Photo from Russian propaganda media



In August 2025, residents of the Berdyansk Geriatric Nursing Home were taken on a propaganda trip to the local history museum

Photo from Russian propaganda media

The occupation authorities also arrange meetings between people living in boarding establishments and Russian military personnel, officials, and collaborators who spread the ideas of the “Russian world.” Officers of the Russian Guard and the Russian Orthodox priest Maxim Smirnov, dean of the Melitopol church district, who converted to the Russian Orthodox Church after the occupation, have visited the Mykhailivskyi boarding home on several occasions. The Security Service of Ukraine has announced that he is suspected of collaborating with the enemy. M. Smirnov has gained notoriety for his actions during the occupation of Melitopol, which include blessing Russian soldiers, consecrating weapons, absolving traitors of their sins, and encouraging residents to participate in the pseudo-elections of the head of the Russian Federation.



Officers of the Russian Guard are known to make regular visits to the Mykhailivskiy boarding establishment, accompanied by the disloyal priest Maxim Smirnov

Photo from Russian propaganda media



In October 2024, the boarding facility hosted another propaganda event: a creative evening called “The Feast of White Cranes,” dedicated to the memory of Russian soldiers who died in the war against Ukraine.

Photo from Russian propaganda media

In October 2024, the boarding facility hosted another propaganda event: a creative evening called “The Feast of White Cranes,” dedicated to the memory of Russian soldiers who died in the war against Ukraine. Representatives of the Russian Guard delivered a presentation to the residents, during which they spoke about the Russian army’s accomplishments.

All of these events are intended to achieve the same objective – to transform boarding establishments into centers of propaganda, with a view to inculcating a sense of loyalty to the occupying authorities among their members.

Systemic violations of international humanitarian law and exploitation of persons with disabilities

There is still much to be revealed about the humanitarian situation in boarding establishments in the temporarily occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region. The Russian information blockade makes it impossible to objectively assess the conditions in which hundreds of elderly people, people with disabilities, and people with mental or intellectual disabilities live. The occupiers exercise comprehensive control over the information space, selectively presenting only the information that serves their agenda, while potentially obscuring underlying issues through a veneer of ostentatious actions.

Despite the norms of international humanitarian law and the articles of the Geneva Conventions, Russia [denies](#) any possibility for international monitoring missions, in particular missions of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to visit social protection and health-care facilities in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine. In light of Russia's announcement in 2019 of its withdrawal from the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, which provides for the investigation of war crimes against the civilian population, and given the documented evidence of such crimes in practice, as well as the inability of international institutions to monitor the situation, there is no basis for trust in Russian propaganda narratives concerning the “care” and “good treatment” of people with disabilities in occupied institutions and of the Ukrainian civilian population in general.

The actions of the Russian occupiers against persons with disabilities and older persons in institutions in the temporarily occupied territories constitute a series of serious crimes under international law. In accordance with Articles 16 and 17 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, persons with disabilities are to be accorded special protection and respect. However, Russia has repeatedly disregarded these principles, in violation of the articles of the Geneva Convention*:

<p>Art. 16. People with disabilities are entitled to special protection and respect.</p>	<p>Russia has repeatedly and deliberately endangered people with disabilities in the temporarily occupied and frontline territories of Ukraine by obstructing evacuation and humanitarian aid deliveries, using institutional premises as military facilities, etc.</p>
<p>Art. 27. Individuals protected under the Convention are entitled to personal respect, dignity, humane treatment, protection from violence, intimidation, and unsolicited attention from the public</p>	<p>Individuals living with disabilities and senior citizens residing in institutions within temporarily occupied territories have been systematically exploited as instruments of propaganda and the promotion of their personal narratives. This process has involved various media outlets, substantial audiences, and visitors, which also falls under the category of crowd curiosity.</p>
<p>Art. 31. No physical or moral coercion may be used against persons under protection.</p>	<p>The denial of social and medical services, as well as social benefits and pensions, on condition of retaining Ukrainian citizenship, is a form of moral coercion.</p>
<p>Art. 33. Under no circumstances may any form of retribution be taken against civilians.</p>	<p>Denying access to social, medical, or rehabilitation services, coercing participation in the creation of propaganda materials, and using loyalty demonstrations as a means of pressure shall be prohibited as they constitute reprisals against the civilian population.</p>
<p>Art. 47. Individuals in occupied territory must not be deprived of the benefits of the Convention due to any alterations in the government or administration of that territory resulting from the occupation. Furthermore, the annexation of all or part of the occupied territory by the occupying power must not lead to the deprivation of these benefits.</p>	<p>The introduction of a new procedure for accessing social and medical services, as well as social assistance and benefits for people with disabilities, which requires the mandatory possession of a Russian passport, unlawfully deprives people of their right to receive support and services.</p>
<p>Art. 49. It shall be prohibited, irrespective of motives, to carry out forced resettlement or deportation of persons under protection, either individuals or en masse, from the occupied territory to the territory of the occupying power.</p>	<p>The deportation of residents of institutions deep into Russian territory, which the occupying authorities justify on security grounds, constitutes a gross violation of international humanitarian law.</p>
<p>Art. 55. The occupying power shall be obliged to provide the population with food and medical supplies by all available means. The Protecting Power reserves the right to inspect the distribution of food and medical supplies in the occupied territory at any time.</p>	<p>It is Russia's direct responsibility to ensure that Ukrainians living in temporarily occupied territories, including those in institutions, have access to sufficient food, medicine, and other necessities. These provisions should not be used as a means to pressure the population into loyalty. Additionally, Ukraine must be allowed to verify the quality and adequacy of the support provided to its citizens in these areas.</p>

* The content of the articles of the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons is outlined in tabular format above.

Forced deportation, the use of people for propaganda purposes, the imposition of Russian citizenship under threat of deprivation of social benefits, support, and medical assistance, and attempts to change the national identity of people with mental or intellectual disabilities are all violations of the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and the norms of international humanitarian law.

Two sides of the same coin

Yevheniia Bulana, the Fight For Right advocacy manager, says that the Russian Federation has definitely committed crimes against the Ukrainian people, including violations of the international humanitarian law, exploiting people with disabilities in institutions in the temporarily occupied territory for propaganda, and pressuring them by restricting access to services and support. The international community needs to pay attention to this.

“*People with disabilities who are stuck in institutions in the part of Ukraine that’s occupied by Russia are now in a really tough and dangerous situation,” said Ms. Bulana. “They’re actually dependent on the occupying authorities, which the collaborators and occupiers are quick to take advantage of. All the charity, demonstrations of loyalty by residents of the institutions, and statements about “care and concern” are just a TV image to reinforce propaganda messages about well-being in the occupied territory. People with disabilities in it are just forced actors. The way the occupiers treat disabled people and the elderly is shown by the way they attack social welfare institutions. For example, the guided air strike on the Sumy Geriatric Nursing Home in September 2024, the refusal to provide safe evacuation routes or even food and medicine to institutions, and the denial of access to international organizations and monitoring groups to institutions in the occupied territories.”*

The advocacy coordinator says that even though Russia is totally responsible for everything that’s going on, Ukraine needs to do a lot more to get people out of institutions and back to safe areas in Ukraine. “We’ve been keeping an eye on what’s going on in the occupied territories since the war started. Unfortunately, in the almost four years since, Ukraine hasn’t made any genuine efforts to get people back to the parts of the territory it controls, or to create safe conditions for them. They haven’t even tried to make a list of people with disabilities who are still in institutions

in the occupied territory. Ukraine has only the approximate number of people living in these institutions before the war, and some fragmented data from the media. Fight For Right has been in touch with the Ministry of Social Policy and the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights. Still, they keep telling us the same thing: there's no one responsible for returning people, and there aren't any practical efforts in this direction. Fight For Right recently published an [analytical review](#) on the fate of people in institutions in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, where all these issues and problems are particularly relevant.

Therefore, the issue of releasing these people remains unresolved. Despite repeated requests from journalists and human rights activists, Ukraine still does not have a single register of residents of boarding establishments who remained in the occupied territories. There is no state program or mechanism to evacuate and return them either. There is no official authority responsible. This means that the fate of hundreds of people is still unknown even to their relatives.

Every day under occupation for residents of boarding establishments is a life of constant uncertainty and complete dependence on Russian structures. People are deprived of the right to choose, control their own lives, and even preserve their Ukrainian identity. They have become hostages of a system that uses them for its own interests and gradually erases any connection with Ukraine.

Every day, residents of boarding establishments under occupation face a life filled with ongoing uncertainty and complete dependence on Russian bodies. They are deprived of their right to choose, the ability to control their own lives, and even the opportunity to preserve their Ukrainian identity. These individuals have become hostages of a system that exploits them for its own interests, gradually erasing any connection to Ukraine.

For them, de-occupation is not just a political slogan; it represents their only chance to regain dignity, legitimate social protection, medical care, and the right to be citizens of their own country.

Only after liberating these territories will it be possible to objectively assess the extent of the damage caused, identify those responsible, and begin restoring the lives of the thousands of people who have become victims of Russian aggression.

We would like to remind you that Fight For Right, together with the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and the All-Ukrainian NGO "Coalition for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities due to Intellectual Disabilities," have prepared [recommendations](#) for interviewing people with various types of disabilities who may have witnessed or been victims of war crimes.

Additional pictures:



Residents of the Preslavskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment clean up the grounds in preparation for the 80th anniversary of the "Great Victory," April 2025

Photo from Russian propaganda media



Residents of the Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment during the celebration of "National Unity Day," November 2024-2025

Photo from Russian propaganda media



Residents of the Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment during the celebration of "National Unity Day," November 2024-2025

Photo from Russian propaganda media



Residents of the Mykhailivskiy Psychoneurological Boarding Establishment during the celebration of the "Great Victory," May 2024

Photo from Russian propaganda media

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