

Authors: Paul Conroy, Eloise Herdegen, Zachary Yacht, Andrew Raynus, and Karolina Hird

Data cut off: 9 am ET, July 21, 2025

To read ISW's assessment of how Russian activities in occupied areas of Ukraine are part of a coerced Russification and ethnic cleansing campaign, click [here](#).

Key Takeaways:

- **Russia is creating and propagating a water crisis in occupied Ukraine. The water crisis is a direct result of Russia's occupation of Ukraine and the resulting destruction and mismanagement of water resources, and is likely a violation of Russia's international legal responsibilities.**
- **Russia continues efforts to consolidate the military-patriotic indoctrination of Ukrainian children under the Russian Volunteer Society for the Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF). Russia will use DOSAAF to streamline the militarization of youth in occupied Ukraine in tandem with the existing ecosystem of youth-focused military-patriotic organizations such as the Movement of the First and Yunarmia.**
- **Crimean occupation officials are taking additional steps to consolidate control over the information space in occupied Crimea in order to more easily levy "high treason" charges against residents for perceived pro-Ukrainian behavior.**

Russia is creating and propagating a water crisis in occupied Ukraine. Acting chairman of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) government Andrei Chertkov stated on July 19 that there is a "critical situation with water supply" in occupied Donetsk Oblast and that residents of various occupied settlements will begin receiving water supply only once every two to three days.[1] Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Adviser Petro Andryushchenko reported on July 17 that large areas of Russian-occupied Ukraine, including Mariupol's Tsentralnyi Raion and settlements and cities such as Chystiakove, Donetsk Oblast, and Berdyansk, Zaporizhia Oblast, currently lack running water.[2] Russian occupation authorities frequently ration water across the occupied territories, turning on running water once every six days in occupied Chystiakove and Torez and once every three to four days in occupied Yenakiieve, Donetsk Oblast.[3] Residents of occupied Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast, also experience water shortages due to frequent power outages that disrupt pumping stations, and are likely to experience them more frequently than residents of occupied Donetsk Oblast due to falling Dnipro River water levels.[4]

Both Russian and Ukrainian media have widely reported on water shortages across Russian-occupied territories. Russian newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, citing Head of the DNR Ministry of Coal and

Energy Denis Epifanov, reported July 17 that critical water shortages could lead to the shutdown of the Zuhres Thermal Power Plant in occupied Zuhres, which provides a third of all power in occupied Donetsk Oblast.[5] *Komsomolskaya Pravda* also reported on July 18 that pro-Russian “activists” in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast are distributing drinking water in coordination with occupation authorities—emphasizing the fact that water must be delivered by hand due to service shortages.[6] Ukrainian outlet *NewsUA* reported on July 14 that according to the occupation administration-run water authority “Vody Donbasa” (“Waters of Donbas”), the occupied cities of Torez, Donetsk City, Makiivka, Yasynuvata, Horlivka, Yenakiieve, Debaltseve, Kirovske, Zhdanivka, Shakhtarsk, and Snizhne are all experiencing acute water shortages.[7]

The water crisis in occupied Ukraine is a direct result of Russia’s occupation of Ukraine and the resulting destruction and mismanagement of water resources. Andryushchenko reported that Russian forces destroyed the water main connecting the Donets River to the Siverskyi Donets-Donbas Canal, which delivered drinking water in occupied Donetsk Oblast until the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and Ukrainian combat units have recently posted footage of Russian forces using dry water pipes as shelters, confirming the fact that water is not running through the canal as it should.[8] This also suggests that Russian forces are using water infrastructure for military purposes. ISW previously assessed that Russia’s destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant on June 6, 2023, severely limited water supplies from the North Crimea Canal to occupied Crimea, highlighting how Russian military activities have put water supplies in occupied areas at risk.[9] Russian occupation authorities frequently blame Ukraine for “cutting off access” to water in order to shift blame away from Russia, but the fact remains that Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has significantly damaged the water infrastructure that existed in these territories prior to 2022.[10]

Russian occupation officials are clearly aware of the water crisis in the occupied territories and have promised to solve the issue, but have been ineffective in managing water shortages.[11] Andryushchenko reported that occupation authorities have raised the price of water in the occupied territories from 3 rubles (\$0.03) to 5 rubles (\$0.06) per liter to compensate for shortages.[12] Ukrainian publication *Vchasno* reported on July 14 that Russian occupation administration officials have begun exploring the use of mining effluent (liquid waste materials created as a byproduct of mining operations) as a source of drinking water to solve the water crisis.[13] Water from mines is polluted with heavy metals, radionuclides, and industrial waste, which makes it unsafe to drink and can cause an increased risk of cancer. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reporter Dmitry Steshin claimed that Russian occupation officials are providing residents of occupied areas with imported bottled drinking water that contains dysentery pathogens.[14] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* Crimea service *Krym Realii* reported on July 15 that Russian law enforcement arrested and fined a woman in occupied Simferopol for organizing a local protest against the water shortages and advocating for the restoration of safe drinking water.[15] Russia has also used bots on local Telegram channels to attempt to influence the information space and spread propaganda minimizing water issues, further suggesting that occupation administrations are aware of the gravity of the issue but are more concerned with managing public sentiment in the information space in order to create the impression that Russia is properly managing the occupation of Ukraine.[16] OpenMinds and DFRLab reported on July 16 that Russia is using fake comments on social media in the occupied territories and has posted over 9.5 thousand fake comments regarding the water crisis.[17]

Russia's mismanagement of the water crisis in occupied Ukraine may amount to a violation of international law. The 4th Geneva Convention requires Russia, as a belligerent occupying power, to provide for the health and hygiene of the population it is occupying, which includes providing basic needs such as clean and safe drinking water. Rather than meeting this obligation, DNR head Denis Pushilin claimed that in order to begin restoring destroyed water infrastructure, Russia needs to capture Slovyansk, using the ongoing humanitarian crisis to justify further violence against Ukraine.[18]

Russia continues efforts to consolidate the military-patriotic indoctrination of Ukrainian children under the Russian Volunteer Society for the Assistance to the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF). DOSAAF is a Soviet-era youth movement that promoted military skills, and which Russia has resuscitated since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.[19] Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo claimed on July 17 that DOSAAF has been training “patriots and specialists” for over a century, and that occupation authorities will transfer water sports clubs, aeronautics facilities, and technical creativity facilities in occupied Kherson Oblast to Russian DOSAAF control.[20] Saldo also reported that his administration is working to transfer facilities associated with the Society for Assistance to the Defense of Ukraine (OSO, the DOSAAF equivalent based in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) to Russian DOSAAF control. The transfer of old DOSAAF and OSO facilities to the control of the contemporary iteration of DOSAAF will allow DOSAAF greater oversight into the Russification of Ukrainian children and youth. Russia lowered the age for admission into DOSAAF from 18 to 14 in 2024, meaning that the organization can now target even younger children in occupied territories.[21] DOSAAF also further creates a conscript recruitment pipeline to ensure that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) maintains enough manpower for long-term goals, as ISW has previously reported, and will allow the Russian MoD to look to youth in occupied Ukraine as a potential recruitment pool.[22] ISW assesses that Russia will continue to use DOSAAF to streamline the militarization of youth in occupied Ukraine in tandem with the existing ecosystem of youth-focused military-patriotic organizations such as the Movement of the First and Yunarmia.

Crimean occupation officials are taking additional steps to consolidate control over the information space in occupied Crimea in order to more easily levy “high treason” charges against residents for perceived pro-Ukrainian behavior. Crimea occupation head Sergei Aksyonov announced on July 18th that the Crimea occupation administration introduced a ban on the distribution of media, photos, and videos, which includes information about locations of Russian air defense systems, weapons, troop positions, and the consequences of Ukrainian drone or missile strikes on military targets in Crimea.[23] This ban is likely to give Russian law enforcement greater access to people’s personal devices and social media posts and will allow Russia to further crack down against perceived pro-Ukrainian or anti-Russian activity in occupied areas. Russia is already pursuing several efforts to encourage self-censorship via information space repression and intense internet monitoring. ISW previously assessed that the Russian occupation authorities would increase surveillance efforts in occupied Ukraine to prevent resistance to the occupation and more easily accuse Ukrainian civilians of “high treason” for allegedly supporting the Ukrainian military.[24] Occupation authorities have previously used artificial intelligence to analyze data collected from video surveillance

of occupied Crimea. This new ban will likely worsen the human rights situation in occupied Crimea and lead to increased arrests, detentions, and long “high treason” sentences against residents.

POWERED BY:



BABEL STREET

-
- [1] <https://t.me/astrapress/86968>
 - [2] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/40468>
 - [3] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/40468> ; <https://fedpress dot ru/news/80/society/3390290>
 - [4] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/40468>
 - [5] <https://www.donetsk dot kp.ru/daily/27726/5115820/>
 - [6] <https://www.zap dot kp.ru/online/news/6477927/>
 - [7] <https://newsua dot one/news-military/114661.html>
 - [8] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/40514>; <https://t.me/andriyshTime/40470>
 - [9] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-occupation-update-june-12-2025>
 - [10] <https://www.donetsk dot kp.ru/daily/27726/5115820/>
 - [11] <https://t.me/AndreyChertkov/696>
 - [12] <https://t.me/andriyshTime/40468>
 - [13] <https://vchasnoua dot com/news/mriut-pro-cistu-vodu-z-krana-v-okupovanomu-donecku-liudiam-xocut-perekriti-deficit-vodi-saxtnimi-stokami>
 - [14] <https://t.me/DmitriySteshin/13811>
 - [15] <https://ua.krymr dot com/a/krym-voda-aktsiya-protestu-peresledivannya/33474029.html>
 - [16] https://t.me/berdyansk_occ/13165
 - [17] <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/report-russian-bot-networks-occupied-ukraine/>
 - [18] <https://t.me/PushilinDenis/6812>
 - [19] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-2-2023>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-30-2024>
 - [20] https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/8519

[21] https://sprotyv.org_dot_ua/en/in-the-tot-of-ukraine-joining-the-dosaaf-military-organization-will-be-compulsory-from-the-age-of-14/

[22] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-3-2025>

[23] <https://t.me/Aksenov82/7802>

[24] <https://isw.pub/OccupationUpdate042125>