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OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE TEMPORARILY  
OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE**

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# The Problem of Preserving the National Identity of Indigenous Peoples in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine

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## Abstract

The relevance of the research is due to the fact that since 2014, three indigenous peoples of Ukraine – Crimean Tatars, Karaites and Krymchaks – have been subject to a full-scale policy of Russification in the temporarily occupied Crimea, which creates an unprecedented threat to their cultural survival. The purpose of the research is to comprehensively analyze the mechanisms for preserving the national identity of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine under occupation, identify the main threats and resistance strategies, and assess the effectiveness of protection instruments at the national and international levels. The methodological basis is an interdisciplinary approach using systemic, comparative legal and institutional analysis, supplemented by the author's sociological survey of 342 representatives of the Crimean Tatar community who left occupied Crimea after 2014. The results of the research showed that the majority of respondents speak the Crimean Tatar language at home, consider Islam an important component of identity, and celebrate national holidays. At the same time, the language situation among children is of serious concern, and state support is assessed by the community as insufficient. Despite this, most respondents expressed a desire to return to Crimea after de-occupation. The conclusions emphasize that Crimean Tatars demonstrate high stability of identity in conditions of forced resettlement, but the language situation among children requires special attention; family upbringing and informal communication are recognized as the most effective strategies for preserving identity, while state support needs to be significantly strengthened, considering the identified needs of the community.

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*Keywords:* indigenous peoples; national identity; Crimean Tatars; Karaites; Krymchaks; temporarily occupied territories.

## Introduction

The issue of preserving the national identity of indigenous peoples in conditions of armed conflict and occupation is particularly acute, since behind each act of destruction of cultural heritage there are specific human destinies – families, who lose touch with their roots, children, deprived of the right to speak the language of their ancestors, communities, deprived of historical memory. International law increasingly clearly recognizes that the destruction of cultural identity is an integral part of the physical destruction of a people, and, therefore, the protection of this right is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative for states. The fate of the few indigenous peoples with sensitive cultural traditions, for whom identity preservation is more about a dignified existence and unrestricted development than it is about abstract difference, is especially concerning.

For Ukraine, this issue is not only theoretical, but also extremely practical: since 2014, three indigenous peoples – Crimean Tatars, Karaites and Krymchaks – have been subjected to a full-scale policy of Russification and assimilation on the temporarily occupied Crimean Peninsula. The historical experience of these peoples already contains tragic pages: the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944, which is now recognized by Ukraine and a number of international institutions as an act of genocide, laid the foundation for an existential threat to the existence of the people. Today, this threat has taken on new forms, adapted to the realities of hybrid warfare.

According to Resolution 2558 (2024) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Russian Federation is consistently implementing a systematic policy of Russification of the occupied territories, accompanied by imperialist and neocolonial historical revisionism, as well as the denial of the separate cultural identity of the peoples living there. As deeply analyzed by Zahorodnia, A. A. (2022), this policy is implemented primarily through the educational sphere: replacing history textbooks, displacing the Crimean Tatar language from the school curriculum, introducing Russian educational standards that transmit the imperial narrative. Such a policy, according to the authors of the resolution, is an integral part of the campaign aimed at the destruction of the Ukrainian national group through the destruction of its identity and culture.

The linguistic dimension of this problem is thoroughly explored by Ponomarenko and Gendzhero (2023), who introduce the concept of linguocide to define the systematic actions of the occupying authorities aimed at displacing the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian languages from all spheres of public life. The authors of a recent study state the critical state of the Crimean Tatar language under the occupation, noting that due to the lack of education in the native language, the

ban on Crimean Tatar media, and the difficulty of communication with mainland Ukraine, the process of language transmission between generations was under threat of a final break.

Analyzing the institutional dimension of resistance, Wilson (2021) explores the role of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people as a legitimate representative body that, despite being banned and persecuted on the occupied peninsula, continues to function in exile and engage in international advocacy. It is thanks to the activities of the Mejlis and other Crimean Tatar organizations that the Crimean Tatar issue remains on the international agenda, and Ukraine manages to convey the truth about crimes against indigenous peoples to the world community.

Thus, the issue of preserving the identity of indigenous peoples in the occupied territories is primarily a question of human dignity: the right of specific people to remain themselves despite pressure and repression. A comprehensive study of legal, cultural, educational and security aspects, supported by empirical data, is a necessary basis for a state policy capable of protecting this right – both during the period of occupation and at the stage of de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea.

*Aims:* The purpose of the research is to analyze the problem of preserving the national identity of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine (Crimean Tatars, Karaites, Krymchaks) in the temporarily occupied territories.

## Methodology

The choice of methodological tools is conditioned by the very nature of national identity, which exists at the intersection of the social and the personal: it is formed in the space between people – in language, traditions, shared memory. The study of how identity is preserved under conditions of occupation and forced displacement requires not only an analysis of legal norms and political processes but also an appeal to the direct experience of people, who daily overcome challenges associated with the threat of losing their own cultural identity. The theoretical and methodological basis of the research constitutes an interdisciplinary approach that allows for integrating the methods of legal analysis, political science and ethnology. The use of systemic analysis made it possible to investigate the complex of threats to the national identity of indigenous peoples as a holistic system, where the policy of the occupying power is aimed at dismantling all components of identity – linguistic, religious, historical, institutional. The comparative legal method was used to analyze the compliance of international standards for the

protection of the rights of indigenous peoples with the real situation of the Crimean Tatars, Karaites and Krymchaks in the occupied territories.

The findings of the author's survey "Preserving the Identity of Crimean Tatars in Conditions of Forced Resettlement", which was carried out between June and September, 2025, serve as the research's empirical foundation. The sample included 342 respondents – representatives of the Crimean Tatar community, who have left the occupied Crimea after 2014 and live in different regions of Ukraine. This sample size ensures the representativeness of the results at a margin of error of no more than 5.3% with a confidence interval of 95%. The survey was conducted using a structured interview method using an online platform (for respondents who are geographically remote) and personal meetings (mainly in Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa, where the largest communities of internally displaced persons from Crimea have formed). The combination of these formats provided both the breadth of geographical coverage and the depth of communication necessary to discuss sensitive issues related to national identity.

The structure of the developed questionnaire reflects the main dimensions of identity preservation in conditions of forced displacement and consists of five blocks. The first block consists of socio-demographic questions (age, gender, education, place of birth and current residence); the second block is devoted to linguistic identity and linguistic practices. The third block of the questionnaire is aimed at studying religious and cultural identity, the fourth block – questions on strategies for preserving identity and public activity, the final block – connection with the historical homeland and prospects for return.

In addition to the survey results, the research was based on open sources, official documents of international organizations (in particular, Resolution 2558 (2024) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, documents of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples) and reports of human rights institutions (the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia, the Anti-Discrimination Center "Memorial", the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience). As Klymenko et al. (2022) emphasize that the combination of empirical sociological data with the analysis of official documents and legal acts allows for creating a holistic picture of the situation of indigenous peoples, where statistical generalizations are complemented by an understanding of the institutional context in which community representatives are located.

The combination of statistical methods with qualitative analysis of open-ended responses made it possible not only to identify quantitative trends, but also to come closer to understanding the inner world of people who, under occupation, are daily searching for an answer to the main question: how to remain themselves when the familiar world around them is collapsing. Behind each indicator, there are living stories of families and communities, whose experience has become the key to understanding the nature of the resilience of national identity in extreme conditions.

## Literature Review

The issue of preserving the identity of indigenous peoples under occupation is attracting increasing attention from researchers, who seek to understand both the scale of threats and the resources of resilience that allow peoples to preserve themselves in extreme circumstances. The educational policy of the Russian Federation as a tool for the elimination of national identity is studied by Ponomarenko and Gendzhero (2023), who, using the example of the language situation, reveal the mechanisms of Russification through the educational sphere. The authors show how the displacement of the native language from the educational space gradually but inevitably undermines the ability of the younger generation to identify with the culture of their ancestors. This study is particularly valuable in that it records not only the facts but also their long-term consequences for the intergenerational transmission of cultural experience.

As Zahorodnia (2022) rightly notes, the analysis of linguistic aspects is key to understanding the transformations of Crimean Tatar identity in modern conditions. Klymenko et al. (2022) explore the other side of the same reality – forms of civic consciousness and national-patriotic development, which, despite the war and challenges, find the strength not only to survive but also to resist, preserving their own dignity and identity. The transformation of identity in war conditions is explored by Borysenko (2022) and Kasianov (2016). As Masnenko (2002) emphasized, historical memory is the fundamental basis for the formation of national consciousness, and its destruction becomes the primary goal of the aggressor. The historical context of this struggle is thoroughly covered in Williams's (2016) work, which traces the path of the Crimean Tatars from Soviet genocide to Putin's conquest, showing the continuity of repressive policies. The importance of a clear distinction between the concepts of "indigenous peoples" and "national minorities" for the real protection of the rights of the Crimean Tatars is revealed in Egizov's study (2024).

Stanchev's (2024) scientific work expands this vision by analyzing the notion of a lost homeland in the identity of Crimean Tatars outside Crimea, which is an important aspect of maintaining a connection with the native land in conditions when direct access to it is impossible. The material dimension of threats is explored by Katchanovski (2015), who analyzes the situation in Crimea before and after the annexation. The author emphasizes that the destruction or removal of cultural values and archives is part of a strategy to deprive the people of their historical memory and documentary confirmation of their right to land.

A separate area of study is focused on the analysis of the activities of indigenous peoples' institutions. Wilson (2021) shows how the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, despite the ban and persecution in Crimea, continues to defend the rights of its people in exile, and Artibani (2025) reminds us of the main thing: behind every

geopolitical decision, there are human destinies, and it is international advocacy that helps prevent the world from forgetting this.

The religious dimension of identity preservation is briefly highlighted in the scientific works of Telehuz and Telehuz (2023, 2025), who show how, in conditions where institutional channels of identity transmission (school, public space, media) are blocked, it is family rituals and cultural memory that become the last bastion of resistance to assimilation. This conclusion is confirmed in the studies of other authors working with similar issues in different regions of the world. An important gender aspect of the problem is revealed by Zidkova and Melikhar (2015), who investigate the identity of Crimean Tatars before and after the annexation, including issues of public security, which has a distinct gender dimension.

Bekirov (2024) shows how global geopolitical shifts are reflected in the fates of specific people, forcing them to make daily choices in favor of their own identity. A general analysis of the survival strategies and resistance of the Crimean Tatars over more than a decade of occupation is presented in the work of Yuling (2025). The researcher systematizes the main forms of resistance – from cultural and informational to political – and assesses their effectiveness in preserving national subjectivity.

Stepyko (2019) emphasizes: behind each line of the state strategy, there should be specific people – Crimean Tatar families, Karaite communities, Krymchaks, whose culture requires not only recognition, but also real support. Therefore, as rightly noted in Lukanska (2021), a holistic strategy for the formation of national identity should put the person at the center with their right to remain themselves even when the enemy tries to take this right away.

Institutional protection of rights at the national level is analyzed by Mishalova et al. (2024), who examine Russia's war against Ukraine as a "war for identity" and appropriation of cultural tradition. Their findings point to the need to strengthen special support mechanisms, in particular, for internally displaced persons from among indigenous peoples. In the broader context of ethnopolitical processes in Ukraine, the issue is considered by Rafalskyi et al. (2022).

The current state of youth identity in the regional dimension is thoroughly examined in the monograph by Ostapenko et al. (2024), which, based on empirical data, reveals the peculiarities of national, political, cultural and economic identification of school and university youth. The authors show how the war affects the youth's planning of their own future and the future of Ukraine. Looking into the future, Sovhyra et al. (2025) analyze the problems of preserving the national identity of Ukrainians in temporarily occupied territories, which directly affects the prospects for the restoration of education in their native language for indigenous peoples after de-occupation. The human aspect of forced relocation is revealed through the lens of scholarly analysis in the scientific works of Telehuz and Telehuz (2023; 2025). The authors describe how, in times of war, when the familiar world is destroyed, people look for and find support in family memory, language, and

traditions – in what keeps them from losing themselves and in passing on to future generations a connection to the past, without which the future is impossible.

## Results

Let us present an analysis of empirical data obtained during the author’s survey “Preserving the Identity of Crimean Tatars in Conditions of Forced Resettlement” (N=342). Tables of raw data from the questionnaire are presented in the Tables 1 and 2. The analysis is carried out according to five thematic blocks that correspond to the structure of the questionnaire, with further generalization of key trends

Table 1. Raw data from the questionnaire

Indicator	%
Gender	
Male	46.2
Female	53.8
Age	
18-25 years old	17.0
26-35 years old	25.4
36-45 years old	27.5
46-60 years old	20.8
Over 60 years old	9.4
Education	
Secondary	14.2
Secondary special	16.8
Incomplete higher education	22.8
Complete higher education	39.8
Academic degree	6.4
Lived in Crimea until 2014	91.2
Linguistic identity and practices (%)	
Indicator	%
Language of home communication	
Exclusively in Crimean Tatar	28.7
Mostly Crimean Tatar	32.7
Equal Ukrainian/Russian	17.0
Mostly Ukrainian/Russian	12.0

Exclusively in Ukrainian	4.4
Exclusively in Russian	3.8
Another language	1.5
Language proficiency level	
Fluent language proficiency	26.0
Intermediate language proficiency	32.7
Conversational level	22.8
I understand but don't speak	12.0
I understand some words	4.4
I do not speak the language	2.0
Children's language (N=208)	
Crimean Tatar	30.8
Mixed	35.1
Ukrainian	18.3
Russian	13.9
Other	1.9
Religious and cultural identity (%)	
Indicator	%
The importance of Islam	
Very important	45.6
Rather important	36.5
Difficult to say	9.1
Rather unimportant	5.3
Not important at all	2.3
I do not practice Islam	1.2
Access to religious practices	
Much more difficult	28.7
A little more difficult	32.7
No changes	19.6
It became easier	6.1
I don't practice	12.9

Holidays observed	
Remembrance Day (May 18)	84.5
Kurban Bayram	79.2
Oraza Bayram	78.1
Nowruz	70.5
Hidirellez	63.7
Crimean Tatar People Flag Day	45.6
Other holidays	12.6
I don't celebrate national holidays	5.3
Identity preservation strategies and civic engagement	
Effectiveness of strategies	Total effectively (%)
Family upbringing	91.2
Communication with relatives/ friends	84.5
Celebration of holidays	76.6
Participation in religious life	64.3
Participation in public organizations	67.9
Reading/viewing in your native language	64.3
Learning the language at courses	58.5
Social networks	51.5
State support assessment	%
Completely sufficient	5.3
Rather sufficient	12.0
It's difficult to answer	16.7
Rather insufficient	32.7
Completely insufficient	26.0
Not aware of programs	7.3

Table 2: Participation in events and interactions

Participation in events	%
Regularly	13.7
Sometimes	28.7
I would like to. but I do not participate	39.2
Not interested	18.4
I am aware of cases of identity change/concealment	25.4
Connection with Crimea and prospects for return (%)	
Indicator	%
Maintain contact with Crimea (total)	81.7
Want to visit Crimea (total)	71.6
Want to return after de-occupation (total)	78.0
including youth under 25 years old	76.3
Obstacles to return	
Lack of guarantees of rights	56.0
Children were born outside Crimea	54.7
Settling in a new place	50.7
Security concerns	45.3
Economic reasons	38.7
Community mood	
Optimistic	19.6
Calm balanced	26.0
Anxious	28.7
Pessimistic	9.9
It's difficult to answer	15.8

The survey included 342 respondents, with a slight predominance of women (53.8%), consistent with the general trend of forced displacement, with women with children more likely to leave conflict areas. The age distribution is relatively even, with a slight predominance of middle-aged people: the largest group is made up of respondents aged 36–45 (27.5%), followed by 26–35 (25.4%) and 46–60 (20.8%). Young people aged 18–25 make up 17.0%, and people over 60 make up 9.4%.

The vast majority of respondents (91.2%) lived in Crimea until 2014, which makes it possible to consider their experience as a direct experience of occupation and forced displacement. Among those who lived in Crimea, the largest number of representatives came from Simferopol (25.0%), Bakhchisarai (13.1%) and Yevpatoriia (11.2%), which generally corresponds to the geography of settlement of the Crimean Tatar community.

At the time of the survey, respondents lived mainly in large cities of Ukraine: Kyiv (26.0%), Lviv region (13.7%), Odesa region (12.0%). More than half (51.5%) live in regional centers or large cities, which creates relatively favorable conditions for access to cultural and educational resources, but at the same time can accelerate assimilation processes due to intensive interethnic contacts.

The educational level of respondents is quite high: 39.8% have a complete higher education, another 22.8% have an incomplete higher education, and 6.4% have a scientific degree. This indicates a significant intellectual potential of the community, which can be an important resource in preserving identity and developing institutional mechanisms for its support.

Language behavior is one of the most sensitive indicators of the state of preservation of ethnic identity. The data obtained demonstrate a fairly high level of preservation of the Crimean Tatar language in family communication, but at the same time reveal alarming trends in intergenerational transmission.

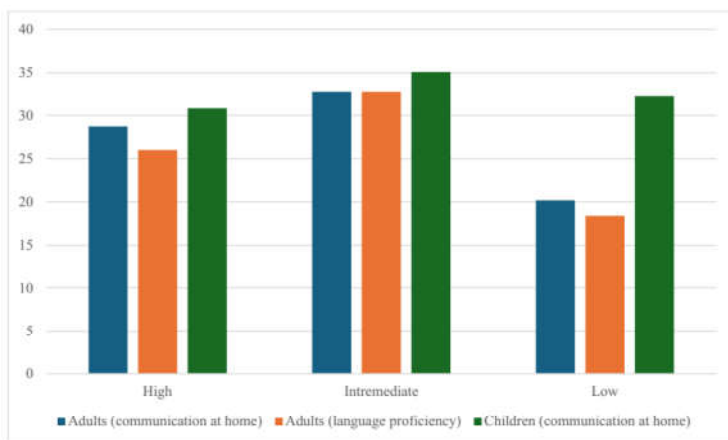


Figure 1. Language of home communication

As can be seen from Table 3, the total share of respondents who speak Crimean Tatar completely or mainly at home is 61.4%. This indicates that for the majority of respondents, the Crimean Tatar language remains the main means of intra-family communication even in conditions of forced displacement. At the same time, 20.2% of respondents noted that they communicate mainly or exclusively in Ukrainian or Russian at home, which may indicate gradual language assimilation (Figure 2).

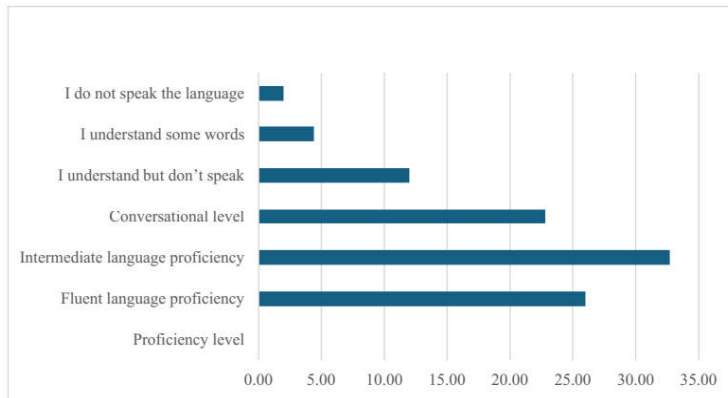


Figure 2. Self-assessment of the level of proficiency in the Crimean Tatar language

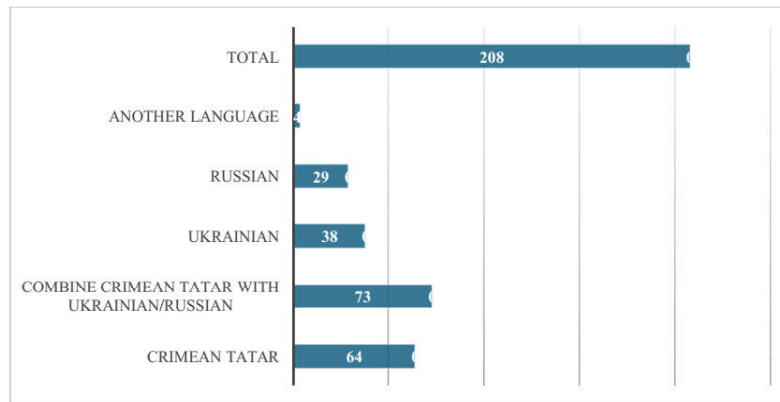


Figure 3. Language of communication of children at home (p. 2.3, among those who have children, N=208)

The data in Figure 2 generally correlate with previous indicators: 58.7% of respondents rate their language proficiency as fluent or good. However, a significant proportion of those who have only a conversational level (22.8%) or understand the language but hardly speak it (12.0%) is noteworthy. In total, 18.4% of respondents have limited language competence, which creates risks for full participation in the cultural life of the community and the transmission of the language to future generations.

The language condition among the children of the respondents is especially concerning (Figure 3). As Figure 3 shows, only 30.8% of children communicate exclusively in the Crimean Tatar language at home. Although another 35.1% combine it with Ukrainian or Russian, a total of 32.2% of children communicate mainly or exclusively in Ukrainian or Russian. This is a significantly higher figure than among the adult population, which indicates a gradual narrowing of the scope of use of the Crimean Tatar language among the younger generation.

It is no coincidence that 67.2% of respondents expressed serious or moderate concern about the preservation of the language among the younger generation. Only 16.4% do not feel such concern.

The frequency of media consumption in the Crimean Tatar language is also indicative: only 18.4% do it daily, 26.0% – several times a week, and 32.7% – only once a week or less. This indicates limited access to quality content in the native language, which is one of the factors that complicates maintaining language competence at the proper level.

The religious dimension of identity turned out to be extremely important for the vast majority of respondents (Figure 4).

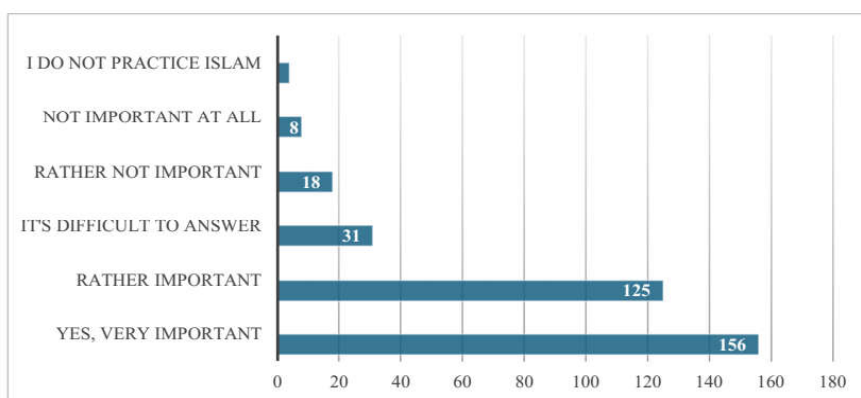


Figure 4. The importance of Islam as a component of national identity

As can be observed from Figure 4, a total of 82.1% of respondents consider Islam to be an important or very important component of their national identity. Only 7.6% consider it unimportant, and 1.2% does not practice Islam. These data confirm the conclusions of Stanchev (2024) that under conditions of occupation, when institutional mechanisms for transmitting identity are blocked, it is the religious sphere that becomes one of the key channels for preserving cultural continuity.

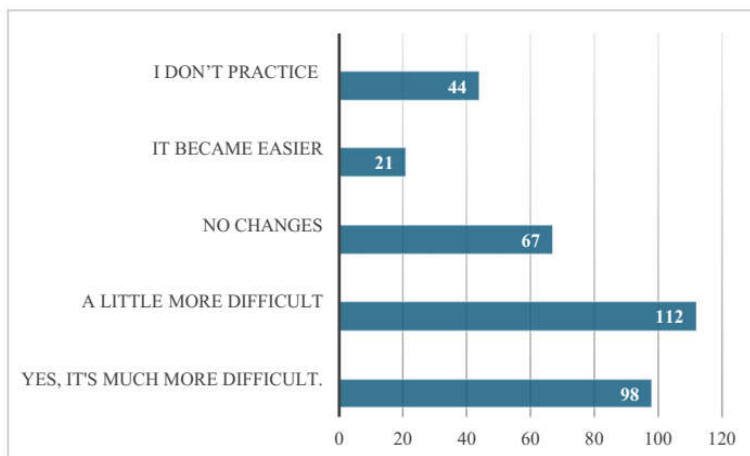


Figure 5. Accessibility of religious practices

At the same time, the conditions of forced displacement have significantly complicated access to religious practices (Figure 5). A total of 61.4% of respondents indicated that observing religious practices has become more difficult (significantly or slightly). Only 6.1% noted improved access, which may be related to living in cities where mosques or Muslim communities operate. 12.9% indicated that they do not observe religious practices, which may be partly a consequence of difficult access to religious infrastructure.

Analysis of the festive and ceremonial sphere demonstrates a high level of preservation of traditional culture (Figure 6). The largest number of respondents (84.5%) celebrated the celebration of the Day of Remembrance on May 18 – the anniversary of the deportation of the Crimean Tatar people. This indicates the extreme importance of historical memory and collective trauma as a consolidating factor for the community. High rates of celebration of religious holidays (Kurban Bayram – 79.2%, Oraza Bayram – 78.1%) confirm the importance of Islam in everyday life. The national holidays Navruz and Hidirellez are also observed in most families (70.5% and 63.7%, respectively). Only 5.3% of respondents indicated that they do not celebrate national holidays. In total, 82.2% of respondents consider the preservation of Crimean Tatar traditions, customs and rituals important or very important, which indicates a high level of value attitude towards cultural heritage.

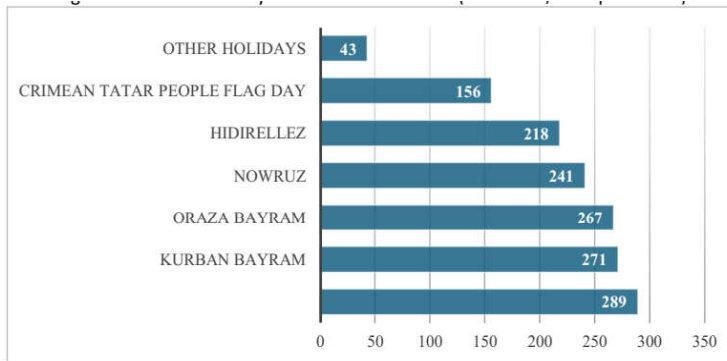


Figure 6. National holidays celebrated in families (clause 3.3, multiple choice)

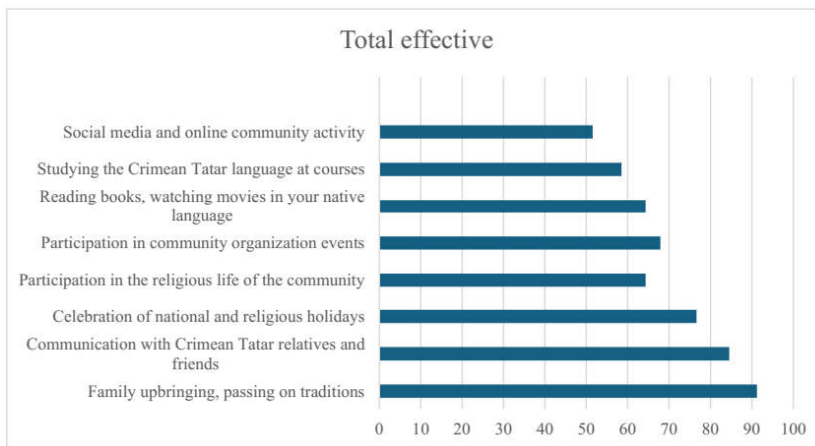


Figure 7. Evaluation of the effectiveness of conservation strategies

In total, 82.2% of respondents consider the preservation of Crimean Tatar traditions, customs and rituals important or very important, which indicates a high level of value attitude towards cultural heritage.

Assessing the effectiveness of various identity preservation strategies makes it possible to identify those mechanisms that community representatives consider to be the most effective (Figure 7). As can be seen from Figure 7, the most effective, according to respondents, are strategies related to direct interpersonal communication and the family sphere: family upbringing (91.2% consider it effective), communication with relatives and friends (84.5%), celebration of holidays (76.6%). Institutional forms, such as involvement in public organizations and religious activities, are evaluated generally favorably, although considerably lower. The least effective was recognized as activity in social networks and

online communities (51.5%), which may indicate limited possibilities of virtual communication for the deep transfer of cultural experience.

Respondents' assessment of state support is predominantly negative (Figure 8). A total of 58.7% of respondents consider state support to be insufficient or completely insufficient. Only 17.3% assess it positively.

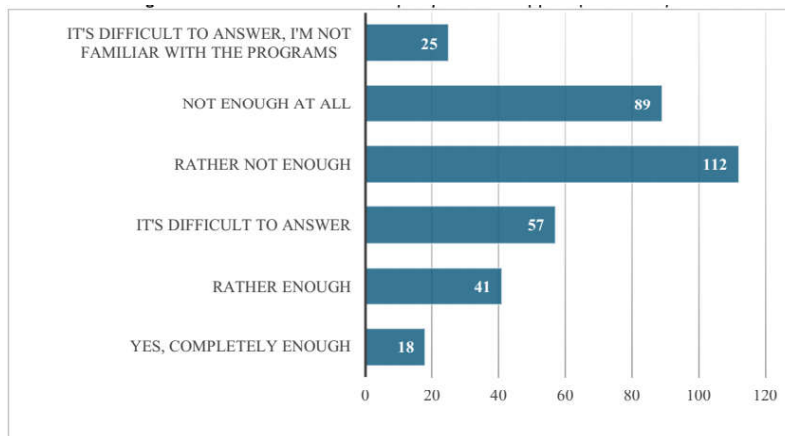


Figure 8. Assessment of the adequacy of state support (clause 4.2)

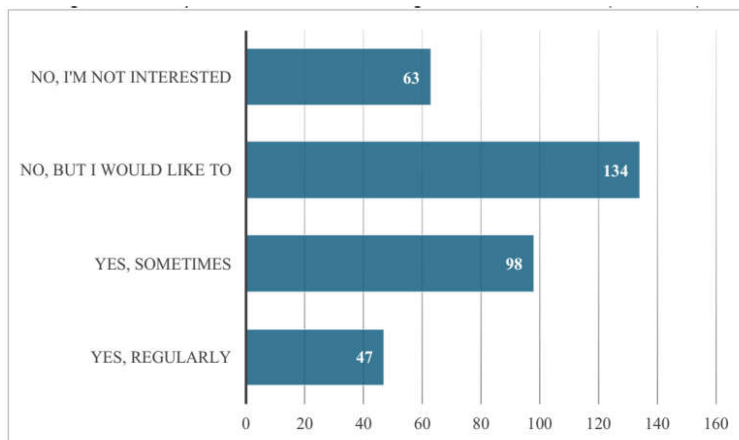


Figure 9. Participation in the activities of organizations and events (clause 4.3)

This indicates a significant gap between the needs of the community and real state policy measures in the field of supporting the cultural identity of the Crimean Tatars.

The level of direct participation of respondents in the activities of Crimean Tatar organizations and events is moderate (Figure 9). Only 13.7% of respondents participate regularly, another 28.7% – sometimes. At the same time, 39.2% expressed a desire to participate, but for various reasons aren't involved. The main reasons for non-participation (item 4.4) are the lack of information about events (56.9%), the absence of organizations or events near the place of residence (49.7%) and the lack of free time (44.2%). This indicates the presence of significant potential for the activation of public life, provided that information is improved and the geography of events is expanded.

A worrying sign is that 25.4% of respondents are aware of cases where people have changed their self-identification or are hiding their nationality due to the occupation. This confirms the presence of assimilation pressure and repressive mechanisms that force people to refrain from publicly demonstrating their identity.

Despite forced displacement, the vast majority of respondents maintain close ties with Crimea (Figure 10).

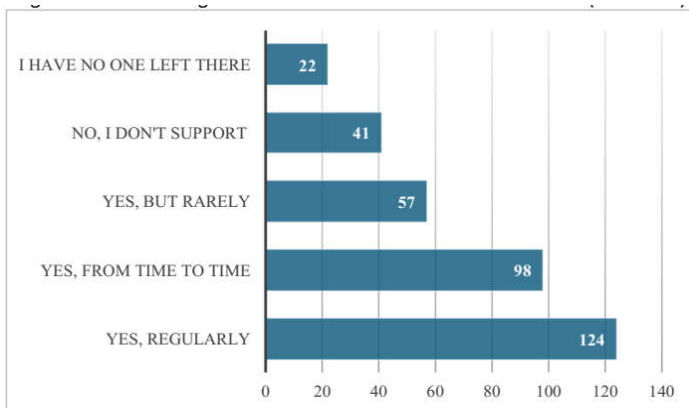


Figure 10. Maintaining contact with relatives and friends in Crimea (clause 5.1)

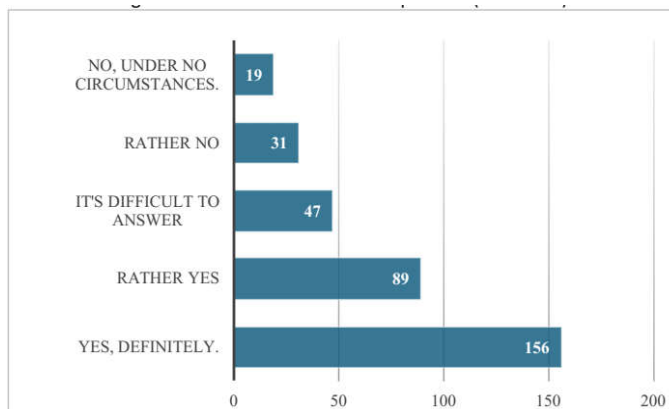


Figure 11. Desire to visit Crimea if possible (clause 5.2)

A total of 81.7% of respondents maintain contact with Crimea (regularly, occasionally or rarely). This indicates that forced resettlement did not lead to a break in social ties with the homeland, which creates the prerequisites for maintaining a living connection with the Crimean reality and potential return in the future.

The emotional connection with Crimea also remains extremely strong (Figure 11). A total of 71.6% of respondents would definitely or rather like to visit Crimea if they had the opportunity. Only 14.7% expressed a negative attitude towards such a prospect.

The most important indicator indicating the preservation of the connection with the historical homeland is the desire to return to permanent residence after de-occupation (Table 3).

Table 3. Desire to return to Crimea after de-occupation (clause 5.3)

Answer option	Quantity	%
Yes, definitely.	178	52.0
Rather yes	89	26.0
Difficult to say	41	12.0
Rather no	23	6.7
No, I don't plan on returning	11	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100.0</b>

A total of 78.0% of respondents expressed a desire to return to Crimea (definitely or rather yes). Only 9.9% do not plan to return or rather do not plan to. It is especially indicative that among young people under 25 years of age, this indicator is also high (76.3%), which indicates the preservation of ties with the historical homeland even among those who were born or raised outside Crimea.

Among the main reasons that may hinder return (paragraph 5.4), respondents stated as follows: lack of guarantees for the protection of the rights of Crimean Tatars (56.0%), the fact that children were born and are growing up outside Crimea (54.7%), settling in a new place (50.7%), security concerns (45.3%), economic reasons (38.7%). These answers indicate areas that will require special attention when developing a policy for the reintegration of Crimea after de-occupation.

The general mood of the community regarding the future (clause 6.2) is restrained and anxious: 28.7% assessed it as anxious, 9.9% as pessimistic, 26.0% as calm, balanced, and only 19.6% as optimistic. This indicates that, despite the high level of preservation of identity and the desire to return, respondents are aware of the complexity of the situation and the presence of numerous obstacles on the way to the desired future.

## Discussion

The conducted research makes it possible not only to see the real state of preservation of the identity of the Crimean Tatar people in conditions of forced resettlement through the eyes of the community representatives, but also to outline those areas of state policy that are truly capable of supporting people in their daily struggle for the right to remain themselves.

First of all, the significant gap between the language competence of adults and children is striking. While 61.4% of the adult population use Crimean Tatar at home completely or mainly, and 58.7% speak the language fluently or well, the indicators of children's language socialization are alarming: only 30.8% of children communicate exclusively in Crimean Tatar at home, while almost a third (32.2%) speak mainly or exclusively in Ukrainian or Russian. This indicates a gradual but inevitable process of language assimilation of the younger generation, which requires immediate intervention. The final break in intergenerational language transmission can be prevented by introducing targeted language immersion programs for children: summer language camps, Crimean Tatar language clubs in communities, as well as expanding opportunities for its study in schools – as a separate subject or optional. It is also extremely important to create accessible digital content for the youngest: cartoons, mobile applications, YouTube channels in the Crimean Tatar language, which would make it a natural part of children's leisure time.

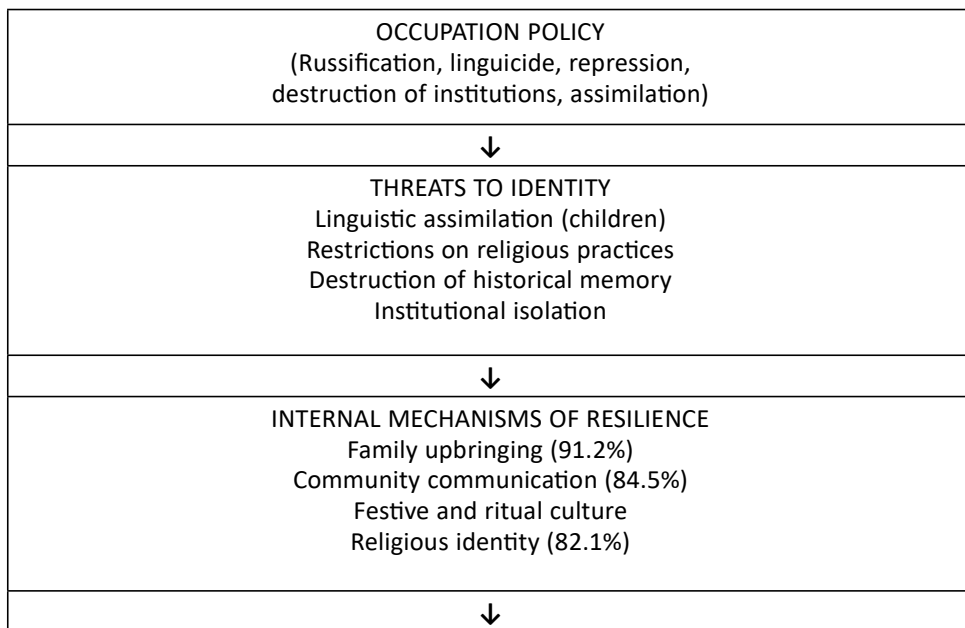
The vast majority of respondents consider Islam (82.1%), preservation of traditions (82.2%) and celebration of national commemorative dates, in particular, the Day of Remembrance of Deportation (84.5%), to be important for them. These components were the most protected from assimilationist influences. However, the conditions of resettlement significantly complicated access to religious practices for 61.4% of respondents, which creates a risk of gradual erosion of even this stable core. Accordingly, state policy should be aimed at supporting the creation of prayer rooms and cultural centers directly in the places of compact residence of displaced persons, promoting the activities of Crimean Tatar religious communities and ensuring access to religious literature in their native language.

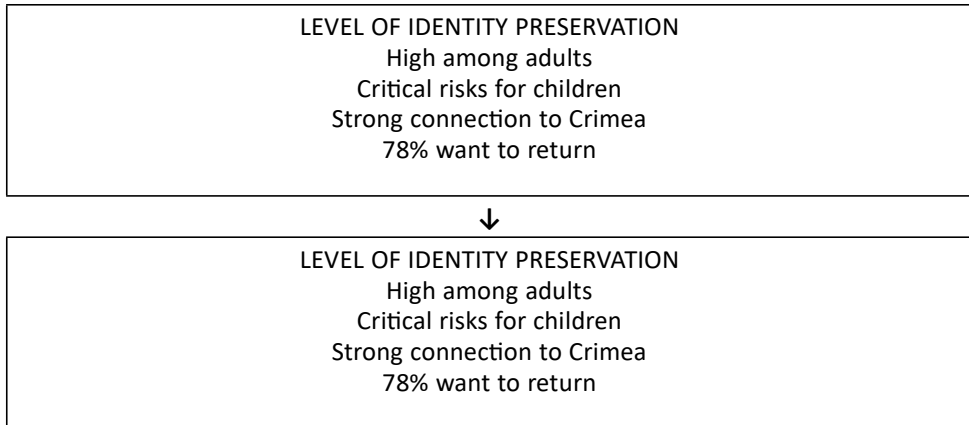
The data obtained clearly indicate that the most effective mechanisms for preserving identity remain informal institutions – family and direct communication in the community. Respondents rated the effectiveness of family upbringing (91.2%), communication with relatives and friends (84.5%) and celebration of holidays (76.6%) the highest. In contrast, institutional forms of support received significantly lower ratings, which indicates insufficient communication between state structures and the community, as well as a lack of trust in official mechanisms. This highlights the need to increase community outreach about available support programs, as well as to involve community leaders, religious figures, and activists directly in the development and implementation of relevant policies.

It is highly indicative that state support is assessed mostly negatively – 58.7% consider it insufficient or completely insufficient. At the same time, the level of direct participation in public organizations is moderate (42.4% participate regularly or occasionally), while 39.2% expressed a desire to get involved in activities, but do not do so due to the lack of information or the lack of events nearby. This indicates a significant untapped potential for civic activism, which could be realized if an information system is established (through social networks, local centers, newsletters) and a network of public spaces is developed directly in the places where displaced people live. Microgrant schemes for “bottom-up” projects that would encourage community self-organization could be a crucial instrument in this situation.

Despite all the difficulties of forced resettlement, the connection with the historical homeland remains at an extremely high level: 81.7% support communication with relatives and friends who remained in Crimea, and 78.0% expressed a desire to return to permanent residence after de-occupation. This convincingly refutes any theses about “voluntary” leaving the peninsula and testifies to the deep roots of the Crimean Tatars in their native land.

Figure 12 presents the generalized results of the survey of respondents on the relevant aspect of preserving national identity. The model demonstrates that despite systemic threats from the occupation policy, the preservation of national identity is ensured by internal mechanisms of community resilience, but requires increased state support to prevent intergenerational losses.





*Figure 12. Conceptual model of preserving the national identity of Crimean Tatars under conditions of occupation and forced resettlement*

*Source: develop by authors based on empirical research, N=342*

At the same time, respondents clearly outline the obstacles to return: lack of guarantees for the protection of rights, security concerns, problems with the integration of children into the new environment, and economic factors. This means that it is necessary to start developing a comprehensive strategy for the reintegration of Crimea today, which would cover not only political but also socio-economic, educational, cultural, and psychological aspects, creating conditions under which return would be safe and desirable.

Finally, the research fixed a restrained and anxious socio-psychological state of the community: only 19.6% assessed the general mood as optimistic, while 38.6% – as anxious or pessimistic. Despite the high level of preservation of identity, community representatives are acutely aware of the complexity of their situation and the numerous challenges they face every day. Accumulated anxiety can become a factor of social tension and complicate integration processes.

Thus, the data obtained indicate a high potential for self-preservation of the Crimean Tatar community, which is realized mainly through family and community ties. At the same time, they clearly outline a number of systemic challenges – the language gap between generations, the complication of religious practices, insufficient institutional support, a high level of anxiety – which require a targeted and comprehensive state policy. Such a policy should be based on the principles of partnership with the community, taking into account its specifics and be aimed at creating conditions for the free development of identity both in mainland Ukraine and, in the future, on the de-occupied peninsula.

## Conclusion

The conducted research shows that the policy of the Russian Federation in the occupied territories of Crimea towards the Crimean Tatars, Karaites and Krymchaks is systematic and purposeful in nature and can be qualified as cultural genocide aimed at eliminating the national identity of these peoples. This policy is implemented through a complex of interrelated tools: linguicide (the displacement of native languages from education, media, and public space), destruction of cultural heritage, political repression against community leaders, forced assimilation through the education system, and demographic policies aimed at changing the ethnic composition of the peninsula. Legal protection mechanisms created by Ukraine at the national level (the Law "On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine") and initiated at the international level (the Crimean Platform, advocacy at the UN and the Council of Europe) create an important institutional basis for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, although their direct effectiveness in the occupied territory remains limited.

The results of the empirical research demonstrate a high level of stability of the national identity of the Crimean Tatars in the conditions of forced resettlement: despite the loss of their native land and numerous difficulties of adaptation, the vast majority of respondents demonstrate devotion to their language, religion, and traditions. It is especially indicative that 78.0% of those surveyed expressed a desire to return to Crimea after de-occupation, which indicates the preservation of a deep emotional and cultural connection with their historical homeland. At the same time, the research revealed alarming tendencies, the most acute of which is the language situation among children: only 30.8% of them communicate at home exclusively in the Crimean Tatar language, while 32.2% – mainly or exclusively in Ukrainian or Russian. This indicates a gradual reduction of the scope of use of the native language among the younger generation and creates risks for the intergenerational transmission of cultural experience. An analysis of identity preservation strategies showed that the most effective, according to community representatives themselves, are family upbringing (91.2%), communication with relatives and friends (84.5%), and celebration of holidays (76.6%), while state support is assessed mainly negatively (58.7% consider it insufficient).

The experience of the Crimean Tatars demonstrates that national identity is maintained through the daily efforts of families and communities, who, in spite of everything, pass on language, customs, and memory to their children. As a result, more studies should be done in order to develop a policy for the reintegration of Crimea that will prioritize living people with their historical traumas and the right to justice rather than abstract rights.

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