

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

|                                    |                            |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Bilagsnr.:</b>                  | <b>643</b>                 |
| Land:                              | Rusland                    |
| Kilde:                             | Human Rights Watch         |
| Titel:                             | World Report 2021 – Russia |
| Udgivet:                           | 13. januar 2021            |
| Optaget på<br>baggrundsmaterialet: | 15. marts 2021             |

Document #2043508

## HRW – Human Rights Watch

### World Report 2021 - Russia

The Covid-19 pandemic provided a pretext for Russian authorities to restrict human rights in many areas, and to introduce new restrictions, especially over privacy rights.

Constitutional reform was a key development in 2020. Several abusive laws found further legal entrenchment in constitutional amendments. Following a controversial plebiscite on the reform in summer 2020, authorities launched a crackdown on dissenting voices, with new, politically motivated prosecutions and raids on the homes and offices of political and civic activists and organizations. Towards the end of the year the government submitted a series of new bills expanding on Russia’s “foreign agent law” and shrinking an already scarce space left for civic activism.

The poisoning of Russian political opposition leader Alexei Navalny in August led to a further deterioration in Russia’s relations with the European Union.

### Covid-19 Response

In April, new harsher penalties were introduced for spreading information, including about the epidemic, deemed to be false, ranging from fines to three years’ imprisonment. Within three months, according to one estimate, authorities opened at least 170 administrative and 42 criminal cases for allegedly spreading false information online about Covid-19.

Healthcare workers faced shortages of personal protective equipment, particularly in the first months of the pandemic. By June, at least 400 medical workers had died of Covid-19. In some cases, those who spoke out about the shortages faced retaliation, losing their jobs and/or facing charges of spreading false information.

Many regions introduced a pass system that required people to obtain permission online or through SMS to leave the immediate vicinity of their houses. Moscow city authorities also introduced an app to track the whereabouts of people exposed to or infected with Covid-19 or displaying symptoms of respiratory disease. The app automatically issued fines that in many cases were wrong. After protracted public outcry, several improvements were introduced. For example, the app no longer issues push notifications at night demanding an immediate selfie as proof of compliance with self-isolation. Authorities also used the city’s vast network of surveillance cameras with facial recognition technology to identify and punish people for violating lockdown restrictions.

Authorities failed to publish regular and transparent information on Covid-19 outbreaks in nursing homes or institutions for people with disabilities.

Many Moscow hospitals suspended provision of legal abortion during the pandemic, even though it is an essential time-sensitive medical procedure that cannot be delayed.

Covid-19 related measures affected Russia’s 16.5 million schoolchildren. More than one-third of schoolchildren reported experiencing depression due to self-isolation and distance learning, according to an official survey of primary and secondary school students.

Russian authorities coordinated at least one repatriation flight for detained migrants, but about 8,000 migrants remained stuck in detention centers at the start of the pandemic, since their deportations were not possible due to travel restrictions.

### Freedom of Expression

In several cases, authorities resorted to wrongful prosecutions against journalists on terrorism and treason-related charges and other tactics aimed at interfering with their journalistic work.

In July, journalist Svetlana Prokopyeva was sentenced to a hefty fine on bogus terrorism charges for arguing that Russia’s repressive policies on speech and assembly radicalized youth. Due to the verdict, she remains on the government’s list of “terrorists and extremists” and is barred from foreign travel.

Ivan Safronov was arrested on dubious treason charges relating to the time when he worked as a journalist. Amended

in 2012, the treason clause in the criminal code is vague and overly broad.

Authorities refused to investigate an incident in which police broke the arm of journalist David Frenkel, who was reporting from a voting precinct during the constitutional plebiscite. Instead, Frenkel was fined on three different counts over the same incident.

In July and September police searched the offices of MBKh Media, an opposition media outlet, allegedly in connection with the 2003 Yukos case, confiscating computers and other devices.

Dozens of journalists were detained while covering peaceful protests in Moscow and other cities, even when they wore press badges and other identification.

Authorities also targeted artists whose work touched on sensitive issues. In June, theater director and dissident, Kirill Serebrennikov, received a hefty fine and conditional prison sentence on dubious embezzlement charges. In January, a stand-up comedian fled the country after authorities opened an investigation into his comedy, following a complaint that it offended religious feelings.

In August, a court sentenced Alexander Shabarchin to two years’ imprisonment on hooliganism charges for placing, in a public square, a life-sized doll with President Vladimir Putin’s face and signs reading “Liar” and “War Criminal.” In November, the sentence was suspended on appeal. At time of writing, Karim Yamadayev was on trial on charges of insulting authorities and “justification of terrorism” over a web video of a mock trial against Putin and other officials.

By March 2020, 12 months after a law banning “disrespect to authorities” was adopted, an independent group found that the overwhelming majority of such charges involved alleged insults against Putin.

In July, a court fined Ivan Zhdanov, head of the Anti-corruption Fund (FBK), associated with opposition politician Alexei Navalny, for failure to comply with a court order to take down a video from YouTube alleging corruption by Dmitry Medvedev during the time he was prime minister.

## Freedom of Assembly

Using Covid-19 as a pretext, the authorities banned all mass gatherings. Police interfered with single-person protests, which do not require approval, in some cases referring to the social distancing and mandatory mask regime even when protesters wore masks. Authorities prosecuted single-person picketers, alleging they were part of a “mass protest.” While other restrictions were gradually eased through the summer and authorities permitted officially sponsored mass outdoor festivals, peaceful protests remained effectively outlawed. In June, July, and August, police detained dozens of peaceful protesters.

In August, police opened a criminal case against Yuliya Galyamina, a Moscow municipal assembly member, on charges of repeatedly participating in unsanctioned but peaceful protests. At time of writing, a trial in her case was ongoing. In 2020, a court reduced the four-year sentence imposed on Konstantin Kotov in 2019 for such charges, to one-and-a-half years. He was released in December.

Mass protests started in Khabarovsk in July continued at time of writing, sparked by the dismissal and arrest of the region’s governor. Initially, authorities did not attempt to disperse the protests, although police occasionally detained some activists involved in these protests, as well as their supporters in other cities, and courts fined or sentenced them to short-term detention on charges of violating public assembly regulations.

However, in October police beat and arbitrarily detained over 20 peaceful protesters. One of them faces charges of repeatedly participating in unsanctioned but peaceful protests. At least three others are under investigation for alleged low-grade violence against police, which can lead to sentences of up to five years in prison. Other protesters were charged with administrative offenses for taking part in an “unsanctioned gathering.”

In June, the Constitutional Court ruled that the list of venues where protests are prohibited is overly broad and unconstitutional.

In November, two news bills concerning peaceful assemblies were introduced to parliament. One proposes to further restrict venues where assemblies can be held and to deem single-person pickets, if held in sequence, a mass event, thus requiring prior authorization. The other proposes restricting sources of donations and placing onerous requirements and obligations on organizers.

## Human Rights Defenders

In July, police indicted human rights lawyer Semyon Simonov, holding him personally accountable for an unpaid fine issued against his human rights organization over alleged non-compliance with Russia’s abusive “foreign agents” law.

Also in July, a court sentenced human rights historian, Yuri Dmitriev, to three-and-a-half years’ imprisonment on apparently spurious and politically motivated charges of sexual abuse of a child. In September, an appeals court increased his sentence to 13 years.

In September, Svetlana Anokhina, who runs Daptar, an online women’s rights platform in the Northern Caucasus, was forced to leave Russia because of death threats, which authorities failed to investigate.

In December, authorities informed Vanessa Kogan, the director of Stichting Justice Initiative, a human rights litigation organization, that her residence permit was revoked. They gave her two weeks to leave Russia, where she had lived with her family, who are Russian nationals, for 11 years.

## Freedom of Association

Russian authorities raided the offices of independent groups under various pretexts and targeted their staff and affiliates, including under the “foreign agents” and “undesirable foreign organizations” laws.

Courts found Maxim Vernikov and Yana Antonova guilty of involvement with an “undesirable organization” and sentenced them to several hundred hours of mandatory labor over their association with Open Russia Civic Movement. The trial against Anastasiya Shevchenko on similar charges resumed in fall. Shevchenko has been under house arrest since January 2019. In July and September, police raided the offices of Open Russia and the apartments of several staff members. Two new cases were opened for alleged involvement with Open Russia against Mikhail Iosilevich, in October, and Leonid Malyavin, in November.

Two prominent Russian rights organizations were fined under the “foreign agents” law. The combined amount of fines against Memorial by mid-2020 was 5.3 million rubles (approximately US\$69,000). Public Verdict, which documents police abuse, accumulated over one million rubles (US\$15,000).

In November, at least five new bills were submitted to parliament that further expand the scope of organizations and individuals that can be designated a “foreign agent.” They also restrict the rights of such organizations and impose on them additional reporting obligations and requirements on displaying the label “foreign agent”.

## Chechnya

Chechnya’s leadership continued its onslaught on all forms of dissent and criticism.

In February, a group of thugs violently attacked human rights lawyer Marina Dubrovina and investigative journalist Elena Milashina shortly after a court hearing against Dubrovina’s client, a blogger who had criticized the opulent lifestyle of Chechnya’s governor, Ramzan Kadyrov. The women documented their injuries and filed a police report, describing the attacks as work-related. There was no effective investigation.

In September, a video circulated on social media showing 19-year-old Salman Tepsurkayev being forced to penetrate himself anally with a glass bottle in retaliation for “spread[ing] lies” about Chechen authorities. Tepsurkayev moderated the Telegram channel IADAT, which routinely features Chechen dissident voices, including those critical of Kadyrov. At time of writing, he remains disappeared and authorities have not opened an investigation.

A prominent Chechen separatist politician in exile, Akhmed Zakaev, made a statement condemning the torture and expressing support of IADAT. Chechen authorities immediately forced Zakaev’s relatives to publicly renounce him.

In June, IADAT extensively covered the suspicious death of Madina Umaeva, a victim of domestic violence, and published a video of Kadyrov forcing Umaeva’s mother to apologize on camera for seeking justice for her daughter’s killing. Authorities refused to open a criminal investigation into Umaeva’s death.

## Counterterrorism

Courts issued guilty verdicts in several terrorism or extremism cases marred by allegations of torture, dubious expert analysis, and reliance on secret witnesses.

In December 2019, 11 people were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 19 years to life over the 2017 St. Petersburg metro bombing. Russian authorities never investigated credible complaints of torture and fabricated evidence.

In February and June, in two separate trials, courts issued guilty verdicts, with prison terms ranging from five to eighteen years, against nine defendants for alleged involvement in “Network” which prosecutors claimed was a terrorist organization. Most defendants insisted that no such organization existed. Authorities dismissed without proper investigation defendants’ torture complaints. The judges accepted testimonies by secret witnesses and allegedly rigged evidence.

In August, seven defendants were convicted for establishing an “extremist organization,” New Greatness. Sentences ranged from four years’ probation to seven years in prison. The defendants complained security officials had entrapped them. The prosecution relied on secret witnesses’ testimony. Torture complaints by one of the defendants were dismissed without a full investigation.

In June, three 14-year old boys were detained and later charged with creating a terrorist organization and planning to blow up an FSB building in the computer game, Minecraft. One of them refused to plead guilty and has been in pre-trial detention since summer.

Russian authorities continued to prosecute people over alleged involvement in Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), a pan-Islamist movement that seeks to establish a caliphate but denounces violence to achieve that goal. Russia banned HuT as a terrorist organization in 2003. In February, 11 defendants in two separate military trials received prison sentences ranging from 11 to 23 years. In September, in a separate case, the Supreme Court upheld sentences ranging from 10 to 24 years for 21 men. At least one of the convicted alleged he had been tortured to extract a confession. Five more men were detained over alleged involvement in HuT in November in Tatarstan.

In August, a military court sentenced opposition writer Airat Dilmukhametov to nine years' imprisonment on extremism, separatism and justification of terrorism charges for a legitimate speech.

Neither the charges against Dilmukhametov nor against the 32 HuT defendants related to planning, carrying out or abetting any act of violence for political or ideological aims.

Authorities continued to prosecute people over affiliation with religious groups designated extremist under Russia's overly broad counter-extremism law.

In 2020, courts handed guilty verdicts to dozens of people for their religious activity as Jehovah's Witnesses, banned as extremist in Russia. At least 10 people are currently serving prison terms of up to six years, while 417 remain under criminal investigation, and 35 are in pre-trial detention. These figures include people arrested in Russia-occupied Crimea.

Authorities arrested at least four people for supposed affiliation with Nurdzhular, a group of followers of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi, banned as extremist in 2008, even though it has no history of incitement or violence. Experts repeatedly questioned the existence of such an organization in Russia and stated that the works of Said Nursi do not contain any extremist views. At least seven Nursi followers remain on Russia's "List of Terrorists and Extremists," their assets frozen, and travel restricted.

Yevgeniy Kim, stripped of his Russian citizenship in 2019 following his prison sentence on charges of alleged involvement with Nurdzhular, remained in deportation custody. Authorities stripped two Jehovah's Witnesses currently serving sentences on extremism charges of their citizenship in 2020. All three are now stateless.

## Right to Asylum, Prohibition of Refoulement

In July and September, authorities forcibly removed at least four asylum seekers to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan despite the risk of torture, pending appeals of their rejected asylum claims, and injunctions against their removal issued by the European Court on Human Rights (ECtHR).

At time of writing, at least 39 current or rejected asylum seekers remained in what amounts to indefinite detention in Russia. The ECtHR enjoined their removal due to torture or inhuman treatment if returned to their home countries, and Russia has suspended removal pending the ECtHR judgment but is also not considering alternatives to detention.

## Environment and Human Rights

In May, a subsidiary of Russian mining giant Nor Nickel spilled over 20,000 tons of diesel fuel in Russia's Arctic, contaminating 180,000 square meters of land before reaching nearby rivers. Two days after the incident, Nor Nickel publicly acknowledged the spill.

Rosprirodnadzor, the government's natural resource management agency, sued Nor Nickel for 148 billion rubles (US\$2 billion) for environmental damage. National security and police attempted to suppress a journalist's investigation into the spill. A whistleblower from Rosprirodnadzor stated that Nor Nickel's security tried to prevent him from accessing the site and intimidated him. An official representative of the indigenous peoples of the North expressed concern that the spill could affect access to food for local indigenous peoples who rely on fishing and hunting.

In July, authorities adopted a new law that exempts contractors from carrying out environmental impact assessments for all "transportation infrastructure modernization projects." The new law and relevant bylaws could affect Lake Baikal, a UNESCO World Heritage site and other protected areas.

In January, after more than a year of continued protests against the construction of a waste dumping site in Shiyes, in Arkhangelsk region, a court ruled the construction illegal.

The contracting company lost an appeal against the ruling in October, but even before the verdict had announced it would cancel the project and restore the land by the end of the year. However, authorities did not drop charges against local activists who had been beaten, detained, prosecuted, and fined for protesting the illegal construction.

After weeks of protests in Bashkortostan against what local activists said was destructive limestone mining, authorities granted the area protected status and construction stopped. Authorities did not drop charges against peaceful protesters who suffered police brutality, detention, fines, and prosecution.

## Nondiscrimination, National Minorities, Xenophobia

The Black Lives Matter protests in the US following the murder of George Floyd sparked debate in the Russian press and social media about racism and discrimination in the country. A biracial Russian vlogger who discussed racism and racist violence in Russia faced threats and online bullying. Authorities responded by cautioning her against “spreading extremist materials.”

According to a watchdog organization, the first eight months of 2020 saw at least 23 hate crimes, with one fatality, and at least 17 episodes of hate-motivated vandalism.

Migrants continued to encounter racial profiling, mass arbitrary detentions, police brutality, and xenophobia. Some Russian officials falsely claimed that crime by migrants had risen in the wake of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. Authorities used this as a pretext to propose a mandatory, intrusive tracking app for migrants and tying migrant workers’ visas to their employers.

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The government continued its trajectory of homophobic discrimination and used the “gay propaganda” ban to justify a criminal prosecution.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activist Yulia Tsvetkova faced six years in prison on pornography charges for posting body-positive drawings of nude women on social media. In December 2019, a court fined Tsvetkova 50,000 rubles (US\$665) for violating the “gay propaganda” law over LGBT-friendly and feminist posts in two social media groups which she administered.

As a result of the 2020 constitutional reform, the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman was incorporated into the constitution. A bill submitted to parliament includes a ban on same-sex marriage and changes that will negatively affect transgender people’s rights, including to marry and raise children.

## Gender-Based Violence

Serious gaps continued in the official response to widespread domestic violence, including lack of sufficient protection and recourse for survivors.

The draft law on domestic violence, introduced in November 2019, fell short of providing a comprehensive definition of domestic violence. It also failed to address several issues crucial to ensuring effective protection for survivors. In early 2020, parliament deprioritized the draft law’s review, and it remained pending.

Several politicians and experts advocating for a robust domestic violence law reported threats against them and their families, including by those claiming to promote “traditional” or “family” values.

Russia’s ombudsperson noted that domestic violence spiked during the Covid-19 pandemic, with reported cases more than doubling during the spring lockdown.

## Digital Rights, Right to Privacy

In 2020, Russia tightened control over internet infrastructure and online content, expanding the capacity of authorities to filter and block online content in violation of the rights to freedom of expression and access to information.

These restrictions built on other internet censorship measures, such as legislative amendments in December 2019 required manufacturers to pre-install Russian apps, including browsers, messengers and maps on smartphones, computers, and Smart TVs sold in Russia.

In June 2020, a new law created a national digital repository of personal data, including employment and foreign residency information, of Russia’s residents, accessible to law enforcement, tax and other government agencies. The creation of a centralized repository of personal data raises concern that it would be vulnerable to data leaks and breaches and other violations of the right to privacy. It is due to become fully functional by 2025.

In November, a new bill was submitted to the parliament that would give authorities power to block websites that have censored Russian state media content; among the websites mentioned are Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

## Right to Health

In March, people with cystic fibrosis and their supporters protested a new government policy substituting original drugs with generic analogues, despite warnings from doctors about questionable effectiveness and reported severe side effects from the generic drugs.

In several 2020 cases concerning Russian children, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued urgent injunctions, under Rule 39 of the court, instructing authorities to provide access to a life-saving drug meant to halt the progression of spinal muscular atrophy. In August, the Russian Ministry of Health included the drug in the federal list of vital medicines.

### Russia and Crimea (see also Ukraine chapter)

Russian authorities continued to conscript males in occupied Crimea to serve in Russian armed forces in violation of international humanitarian law, and imposed criminal penalties against those who refused to serve.

Authorities continued to bring unfounded, politically motivated terrorism charges against Crimean Tatars. In September, a Russian military court sentenced seven Crimean Tatar activists to prison terms ranging from 13 to 19 years for alleged association with HuT. The organization is legal in Ukraine. One man was acquitted.

### Russia and Syria (see also Syria chapter)

The Syrian-Russian military alliance continued to deliberately and indiscriminately attack civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, markets, homes, and shelters, through what has become trademark tactics over the years, including the use of internationally banned weapons. Human Rights Watch documented 18 unlawful attacks in Idlib between January and March 2020, before a ceasefire was put into place. These 18 attacks damaged and destroyed six schools, one kindergarten, four healthcare facilities, three housing areas, two industrial sites, one market, one prison, and three camps for the displaced. The attacks killed at least 112 people and wounded at least another 359. Cluster munitions were used in two of the attacks, which were on one primary school and one secondary school in Idlib City in February 2020. At least three of the attacks were carried out by the Russian military. The attacks constituted apparent war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity.

In 2019, Russia cast its 14th veto on Syria to block cross-border aid to northeast Syria, an area that is under the control of Kurdish-led groups. It also attempted to block funding for United Nations investigations into grave abuses in Syria. Russia also tried to block funding for a unit at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons tasked with identifying those responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

In February, Russia repatriated 25 orphans held as family members of Islamic State (ISIS) suspects in northeast Syria. In August-September, another 41 children were repatriated.

[IMG | SOURCE:  
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/styles/16x9\_medium/public/media\_2020/10/202007CC\_Syria\_Idlib.jpg?h=4cce6f57&itok=p7CkTHWK | ALT: Woman and child in rubble in Idlib]

### Key International Actors

The European Union strongly condemned the poisoning of Navalny as an assassination attempt. The foreign ministries of France and Germany issued a joint communique that condemned the poisoning and noted this was not an isolated incident of the use of Novichok nerve agent. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called for an independent and impartial investigation.

In June, the Council of Europe's (CoE) Venice Commission issued an opinion on the then-draft constitutional amendments. The commission reiterated its opinion that giving the Constitutional Court the power to declare a judgment of ECtHR non-executable, a position enshrined in the amendments, contradicts Russia's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The EU called on Russian authorities to condemn and investigate threats by Chechen authorities against Milashina, and to ensure her safety. The EU also called for criminal charges against Prokopyeva to be dropped and urged Russian authorities to “ensure that journalists can work in a safe environment without fear of reprisal.”

In July, UN special rapporteur for human rights defenders and the CoE human rights commissioner expressed concern over the criminal prosecution of Simonov.

The EU condemned listing the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) as an “undesirable organization” and urged the Russian authorities to bring its legislation in line with European and international human rights law.

In July, the EU called for the release of historian Yuri Dmitriev immediately and unconditionally, on humanitarian grounds, taking into account his age and state of health in the light of the coronavirus pandemic.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on the human rights  
situation in 2020

**Country:**

Russian Federation

**Source:**

[HRW – Human Rights Watch](#)

**Original link:**

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/russia>

**Document type:**

Periodical Report

**Language:**

English

**Published:**

13 January 2021

**Document ID:**

2043508

|                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Austrian Red Cross</b><br>Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum<br>Research and Documentation (ACCORD) | Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien<br><b>T (Telefon)</b> +43 1 589 00 583<br><b>F (Fax)</b> +43 1 589 00 589<br><a href="mailto:info@ecoi.net">info@ecoi.net</a> | Contact<br>Imprint & Disclaimer<br>F.A.Q.<br>Data Protection Notice |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

