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2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Russia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ANNOUNCEMENT: The Department of State will release an addendum to this report in mid 2021 that expands the subsection on Women in Section 6 to include a broader range of issues related to reproductive rights.

The Russian Federation has a highly centralized, authoritarian political system dominated by President Vladimir Putin. The bicameral Federal Assembly consists of a directly elected lower house (State Duma) and an appointed upper house (Federation Council), both of which lack independence from the executive. The 2016 State Duma elections and the 2018 presidential election were marked by accusations of government interference and manipulation of the electoral process, including the exclusion of meaningful opposition candidates. On July 1, a national vote held on constitutional amendments did not meet internationally recognized electoral standards.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service, the Investigative Committee, the Office of the Prosecutor General, and the National Guard are responsible for law enforcement. The Federal Security Service is responsible for state security, counterintelligence, and counterterrorism, as well as for fighting organized crime and corruption. The national police force, under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is responsible for combating all crime. The National Guard assists the Federal Security Service’s Border Guard Service in securing borders, administers gun control, combats terrorism and organized crime, protects public order, and guards important state facilities. The National Guard also participates in armed defense of the country’s territory in coordination with Ministry of Defense forces. Except in rare cases, security forces generally report to civilian authorities. National-level civilian authorities have, at best, limited control over security forces in the Republic of Chechnya, which are accountable only to the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov. Members of the Russian security forces committed numerous human rights abuses.

The country’s occupation and purported annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula continued to affect the human rights situation there significantly and negatively. The Russian government continued to arm, train, lead, and fight alongside Russia-led separatist forces in eastern Ukraine. Credible observers attributed thousands of civilian deaths and injuries, as well as numerous abuses, to Russian-led forces in Ukraine’s Donbas region (see the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine). Authorities also conducted politically motivated arrests, detentions, and trials of Ukrainian citizens in Russia, many of whom claimed to have been tortured.

Significant human rights issues included: extrajudicial killings and attempted extrajudicial killings, including of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons in Chechnya by local government authorities; enforced disappearances; pervasive torture by government law enforcement officers that sometimes resulted in death and occasionally involved sexual violence or punitive psychiatric incarceration; harsh and life-threatening conditions in prisons; arbitrary arrest and detention; political and religious prisoners and detainees; politically motivated reprisals against individuals located outside the country; severe arbitrary interference with privacy; severe suppression of freedom of expression and media, including the use of “antiextremism” and other laws to prosecute peaceful dissent and religious minorities; violence against journalists; blocking and filtering of internet content and banning of online anonymity; severe suppression of the right of peaceful assembly; severe suppression of freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on “foreign agents” and “undesirable foreign organizations”; severe restrictions of religious freedom; refoulement of refugees; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; severe limits on participation in the political process, including restrictions on opposition candidates’ ability to seek public office and conduct political campaigns, and on the ability of civil society to monitor election processes; widespread corruption at all levels and in all branches of government; lack of investigation of and accountability for violence against women; coerced abortion and forced sterilization; trafficking in persons; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence against persons with disabilities, members of ethnic minorities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons.

The government failed to take adequate steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, or punish most officials who committed abuses, resulting in a climate of impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were several reports the government or its agents committed, or attempted to commit, arbitrary or unlawful killings. Impunity was a significant problem in investigating whether security force killings were justifiable (see section 1.e.).

Opposition activist and anticorruption campaigner Aleksey Navalny was poisoned on August 20 with a form of Novichok, a nerve agent that was also used in the 2018 attack on former Russian intelligence officer Sergey Skripal in the United Kingdom. After campaigning in Siberia for independent candidates for local elections, Navalny became severely ill and fell into a coma. The Federal Security Service (FSB) was tracking and surveilling Navalny during his stay in Tomsk. On August 21, officials at the Omsk hospital where Navalny was initially treated claimed they found no traces of poison in his system. Navalny was transferred to a hospital in Germany on August 22; on September 2, the German government announced that traces of a nerve agent from the “Novichok” group had been found in samples taken from Navalny. At Germany’s request the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) conducted a technical assistance visit, which confirmed that Navalny was exposed to a nerve agent belonging to the “Novichok” group.

Credible reports indicated that officers from Russia’s FSB used a nerve agent to poison Navalny. The G7 industrialized democracies bloc and NATO countries condemned Navalny’s confirmed poisoning and called on Russia to bring the perpetrators to justice. At the November 30 OPCW Conference of States Parties, 58 countries issued a statement urging Russia to disclose “in a swift and transparent manner the circumstances of this chemical weapons attack.” Russian authorities stated there are no grounds to open a criminal investigation into the poisoning, despite Navalny’s requests that they do so.

Credible nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and independent media outlets published reports indicating that from December 2018 to January 2019, local authorities in the Republic of Chechnya renewed a campaign of violence against individuals perceived to be members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community. According to the NGO Russian LGBT Network, local Chechen authorities illegally detained and tortured at least 40 individuals, including two who reportedly died in custody from torture. According to human rights organizations, as of September authorities failed to investigate the allegations or reports of extrajudicial killings and mass torture of LGBTI persons in Chechnya and continued to deny there were any LGBTI persons in Chechnya.

There were multiple reports that, in some prison colonies, authorities systematically tortured inmates (see section 1.c.), in some cases resulting in death or suicide. According to media reports, on April 10, prisoners in Penal Colony Number 15 (IK-15) in Angarsk rioted after a prison employee beat one of the inmates, leading him to make a video about his ordeal and slash his veins in a failed suicide attempt. Afterwards, 17 other inmates slashed their veins as well, then set fire to parts of the penal colony. The Federal Penitentiary Service sent in approximately 300 special force officers, who beat the inmates, doused them with water, and set dogs on them. Human rights activists reported that two inmates were killed during the clashes and called for an investigation. On April 14, Justice Minister Konstantin Chuychenko told media that the riot in IK-15 had been organized from the outside by individuals who had paid “so-called human rights activists” to “stir things up in the media.” Officials confirmed that they found the body of an inmate who had been strangled and hanged. According to media reports, the inmate who made the video that set off the riots later retracted his statement that he had been beaten by a prison employee.

Although Deputy Defense Minister Andrey Kartapolov announced on August 26 that hazing and “barracks hooliganism” in the armed forces had been completely eradicated, physical abuse and hazing, which in some cases resulted in death or suicide, continued to be a problem. For example, on June 21, Russian media reported that Aleksandr Tatarenko, a soldier in a Primorsky region military unit, deserted his post, leaving a suicide note indicating hazing as the reason. After two months, Tatarenko was found living under a bridge while hiding from his unit. Tatarenko’s parents filed a complaint on hazing with the Military Prosecutor’s Office.

In February government spokesperson Dmitry Peskov dismissed calls for an international investigation into the 2015 killing of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, telling journalists that such an investigation would not be permitted on the territory of the Russian Federation. Human rights activists and the Nemtsov family continued to believe that authorities were intentionally ignoring the question of who ordered and organized the killing and noted that these persons were still at large.

There were reports that the government or its proxies committed, or attempted to commit, extrajudicial killings of its opponents in other countries. For example, on January 30, blogger Imran Aliyev was found dead in a hotel room in Lille, France, having been stabbed 135 times. Aliyev, who had settled in Belgium after leaving Chechnya, often published YouTube videos critical of Chechnya head Ramzan Kadyrov and the Chechen government. French prosecutors stated that the Russian-born man suspected of killing Aliyev returned to Russia immediately after the stabbing.

On July 4, a man identified by Austrian authorities only as a Russian citizen shot and killed Mamikhan Umarov, an asylum seeker from Russia, in a parking lot outside of Vienna. Umarov was also an outspoken critic of Kadyrov and had posted a YouTube video taunting Kadyrov to “come and stop [him]” shortly before his death. In his interviews and social media posts, Umarov claimed to be a mercenary who had fought on the side of Chechen separatists in the 1990s and sought asylum in 2005 because he feared reprisal in Chechnya. Austrian authorities had designated him a

“person at risk” because of his background. Kadyrov responded to allegations of his involvement in this and other extrajudicial killings of Russian citizens in Europe by accusing Western intelligence of killing Chechen dissidents to make him look bad.

The country played a significant military role in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, where human rights organizations attributed thousands of civilian deaths and other abuses to Russian-led forces. Russian occupation authorities in Crimea also committed widespread abuses (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine).

Since 2015 the country’s forces have conducted military operations, including airstrikes, in the conflict in Syria. According to human rights organizations, the country’s forces took actions, such as bombing urban areas, that intentionally targeted civilian infrastructure (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Syria).

The news website Caucasian Knot reported that violent confrontations with security forces resulted in at least 14 deaths in the North Caucasus during the first half of the year. Dagestan was the most affected region, with seven deaths in the first half of the year, followed by Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia, where three persons were killed in each region.

b. Disappearance

There were reports of disappearances perpetrated by or on behalf of government authorities. Enforced disappearances for both political and financial reasons continued in the North Caucasus. According to the August report of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, there were 867 outstanding cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances in the country.

There were reports that police committed enforced disappearances and abductions during the year. For example, on September 10, the Civic Assistance Committee reported that a North Korean citizen who was seeking asylum in Vladivostok was taken to the Artyom City Police Department by individuals in civilian clothes, where he subsequently disappeared. The North Korean citizen first approached a Migration and Law network lawyer for assistance with an asylum request on August 27, stating that he fled the Far Eastern Federal University campus on Russky Island. An officer at the Frunzenskiy District Police Department told the lawyer that the North Korean consulate took the asylum seeker from the police department. The asylum seeker’s lawyer suspected that he was forcibly returned to his country of origin.

Security forces were allegedly complicit in the kidnapping and disappearance of individuals from Central Asia, whose forcible return was apparently sought by their governments (see section 2.f.).

There were continued reports of abductions and torture in the North Caucasus, including of political activists and others critical of Chechnya head Kadyrov. On October 28, IADAT, a social media channel that is highly critical of Kadyrov, reported that Chechen security forces abducted more than 1,500 persons between April and October. For example, on September 6, Salman Tepsurkayev, a 19-year-old Chechen activist and a IADAT moderator, was kidnapped, reportedly by persons with connections to Chechen authorities. On September 7, a video recording of Tepsurkayev circulated on social media in which he appeared naked with signs of torture as he said, “I am punishing myself” and sat on a glass bottle. The office of the Chechen human rights ombudsman commented it was aware of the video of Tepsurkayev but had not looked into the matter because there had been no request from the victim or the relatives. As of December 1, Tepsurkayev’s whereabouts were unknown.

On October 20, the human rights group Memorial reported that five men were abducted from the village of Chechen-Aul on August 28, and two more were abducted on August 30. Memorial stated that all seven men were taken to the city of Argun, where they were visited by the Chechen interior minister Ruslan Alkhanov and Chechen deputy prime minister Abuzaid Vismuradov before being transferred to a secret prison, where they were interrogated and tortured. Four of the men were later released (two on September 18 and two on October 7), while three reportedly remained in government detention facilities as of December. Memorial reported that 13 men were abducted on November 5 from the Chechen city of Gudermes and taken to a secret prison, where Memorial believed they remained as of December.

There were reports Russian-led forces and Russian occupation authorities in Ukraine engaged in enforced disappearances (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the constitution prohibits such practices, numerous credible reports indicated law enforcement officers engaged in torture, abuse, and violence to coerce confessions from suspects, and authorities only occasionally held officials accountable for such actions.

In December 2019, for the first time, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation published data on the use of torture in prisons and pretrial detention centers. The data showed that between 2015 and 2018, for every 44 reports of violence perpetrated by Federal Penitentiary Service employees, only one criminal case was initiated.

There were reports of deaths as a result of torture (see section 1.a.).

Physical abuse of suspects by police officers was reportedly systemic and usually occurred within the first few days of arrest in pretrial detention facilities. Reports from human rights groups and former police officers indicated that police most often used electric shocks, suffocation, and stretching or applying pressure to joints and ligaments

because those methods were considered less likely to leave visible marks. The problem was especially acute in the North Caucasus. According to the Civic Assistance Committee, prisoners in the North Caucasus complained of mistreatment, unreasonable punishment, religious and ethnic harassment, and inadequate provision of medical care.

There were reports that police beat or otherwise abused persons, in some cases resulting in their death. For example, media reported that members of Russia’s National Guard forcibly dispersed a peaceful political rally in Khabarovsk City on October 12. Several participants reported being beaten by police during the rally’s dispersal, at least one with a police baton; one victim suffered a broken nose. Two detained minors said they were “put on their knees in a corner, mocked, had their arms twisted, and were hit in the eye.”

There were reports that law enforcement officers used torture, including sleep deprivation, as a form of punishment against detained opposition and human rights activists, journalists, and critics of government policies. For example, on May 11, Russian media reported Vladimir Vorontsov, the creator of the *Police Ombudsman* project, was hospitalized after being kept in an isolation ward in a prison. According to his lawyer, authorities detained Vorontsov on May 7, denied his request for medical assistance, and interrogated him into the evening, after which he was placed in solitary confinement and not allowed to sleep. On May 8, Vorontsov was charged with extorting money from a police officer. Vorontsov alleged the charges against him were revenge for his social activism, which involved reporting on officials’ labor rights violations of law enforcement officers.

In several cities police reportedly subjected members of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a religious group banned under antiextremism laws, to physical abuse and torture following their arrest. For example, on February 10, officers from the Russian National Guard handcuffed Chita resident Vadim Kutsenko and took him to a local forest, where they beat his face and neck, suffocated him, and used a Taser to force him to admit to being a practicing member of Jehovah’s Witnesses. When Kutsenko reported the incident to authorities, he was ignored and sent to a temporary detention center along with three other members of Jehovah’s Witnesses. According to media reports, Kutsenko sought medical treatment upon his release, which confirmed the physical trauma.

There were multiple reports of the FSB using torture against young “anarchists and antifascist activists” who were allegedly involved in several “terrorism” and “extremism” cases. For example, on February 10, a court in Penza found seven alleged anarchists and antifascist activists supposedly tied to a group known as “Set” (“Network”) guilty of terrorism and sentenced them to between six and 18 years in prison. Authorities claimed they were plotting to overthrow the government, but human rights activists asserted that the FSB falsified evidence and fabricated the existence of the organization known as “Set/Network.” Several of the sentenced men claimed that the FSB forced them to sign admissions of guilt under torture; one of them claimed he had marks on his body from electric shocks and asked for medical experts to document them but was denied the request. Memorial considered all seven men sentenced to be political prisoners.

In the North Caucasus region, there were widespread reports that security forces abused and tortured both alleged militants and civilians in detention facilities. On January 20, Aminat Lorsanova became the second individual to file a complaint with federal authorities asking for an investigation into abuses against the LGBTI community in Chechnya. In 2018 she was forcibly detained at one psychiatric clinic for 25 days and at another for four months. She was beaten with sticks and injected with tranquilizer to “cure” her of her bisexual identity. Dzhambulat Umarov, Chechnya’s minister of national policy, foreign relations, press, and information, publicly denied Lorsanova’s claims and accused the LGBTI community of deceiving “a sick Chechen girl.”

There were reports of rape and sexual abuse by government agents. For example, media reported on Mukhtar Aliyev’s account of his five years in IK-7 prison in Omsk region from 2015 until his release during the year, where he was subjected to torture, including sexual assault. Aliyev told media that prison officials would beat him, tie him to the bars for a prolonged length of time causing his legs and arms to swell up, and force other inmates to assault him sexually while recording their actions. Aliyev said that the officials threatened to leak the recording to other inmates and officials if he did not behave.

There were reports of authorities detaining defendants for psychiatric evaluations to exert pressure on them or sending defendants for psychiatric treatment as punishment. Prosecutors and certified medical professionals may request suspects be placed in psychiatric clinics on an involuntary basis. For example, on May 12, approximately two dozen riot police stormed the home of Aleksandr Gabyshev, a Siberian shaman who announced in 2019 that he and his supporters planned to walk from Yakutsk to Moscow to “expel” Vladimir Putin from the Kremlin. Police detained Gabyshev and forcibly hospitalized him for psychiatric treatment. On May 29, Gabyshev filed a claim refusing further hospitalization, after which the clinic’s medical commission deemed him a danger to himself and others and filed a lawsuit to extend his detention there. The clinic released Gabyshev on July 22.

Reports of nonlethal physical abuse and hazing continued in the armed forces. Activists reported such hazing was often tied to extortion schemes. On January 22, the online media outlet 29.ru published an interview with the mother of conscript Ilya Botygin, who claimed that he was a victim of repeated hazing in his Nizhny Novgorod-based unit. The mother said that her son’s superiors locked him up for several days at a time, fed him irregularly, and beat him. When she visited him in January, she took him to the emergency room for a medical examination, but his unit did not accept the paperwork documenting his injuries on the grounds it could be forged. She and Botygin filed a case with the Nizhny Novgorod military prosecutor’s office but told media they had not received any updates about an investigation.

There were reports that Russian-led forces in Ukraine’s Donbas region and Russian occupation authorities in Crimea

engaged in torture (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine).

Impunity was a significant problem in the security forces. According to a July 25 investigation published by independent news outlet *Novaya Gazeta*, tens of thousands of cases of beatings and torture by the military, police, and other security forces could have gone unpunished in the previous 10 years. The report assessed the Investigative Committee’s lack of independence from police as a key factor hampering accountability, because the organization failed to initiate investigations into a high number of incidents.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in prisons and detention centers varied but were often harsh and life threatening. Overcrowding, abuse by guards and inmates, limited access to health care, food shortages, and inadequate sanitation were common in prisons, penal colonies, and other detention facilities.

Physical Conditions: Prison overcrowding remained a serious problem. While the law mandates the separation of women and men, juveniles and adults, and pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners in separate quarters, anecdotal evidence indicated not all prison facilities followed these rules. On March 31, Amnesty International urged authorities to take urgent measures to address the potentially devastating consequences of COVID-19 if it spreads among prisoners and detainees. The organization stated that prisons’ overcrowding, poor ventilation, and inadequate health care and sanitation led to a high risk of infection among prisoners and detainees.

Physical and sexual abuse by prison guards was systemic. For example, Russian media reported that on February 13, the prison warden of IK-5 in Mordovia, Valeriy Trofimov, took prisoner Ibragim Bakaniyev into his office and beat and humiliated him for six hours. Bakaniyev was accused of taking part in a riot that broke out earlier that night. Bakaniyev reported that the torture only ended when he used a hidden blade to cut his hand and threatened to commit suicide. Bakaniyev was sent to a punishment cell for the next three months.

Prisoner-on-prisoner violence was also a problem. For example, the Committee against Torture in Krasnodar reported that authorities opened a criminal investigation into the July 7 death of Dmitriy Kraskovskiy, a detainee in Pretrial Detention Facility Number 1 in Krasnodar. Authorities suspected he was beaten to death by inmates. The preliminary report indicated multiple bruises and head wounds on Kraskovskiy. The perpetrators allegedly tried to hang the corpse to hide the cause of death.

There were reports prison authorities recruited inmates to abuse other inmates. For example, on July 22, Russian media and the Civic Assistance Committee reported that a group of inmates tortured and sexually assaulted Makharbi Tosuyev, a prisoner at IK-7, who was confined to the psychiatric department of IK-3. According to Tosuyev, a group of inmates tied him to his bed while he was confined in the psychiatric department of IK-3 as a result of a self-inflicted injury, and tortured and sexually assaulted him with a plastic stick. Tosuyev accused the head of the operational department of IK-3, Edgar Hayrapetyan, of organizing the attack.

Overcrowding, ventilation, heating, sanitation, and nutritional standards varied among facilities but generally were poor. Opportunities for movement and exercise in pretrial detention were minimal. Potable water was sometimes rationed, and food quality was poor; many inmates relied on food provided by family or NGOs. Access to quality medical care remained a problem. For example, according to the European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a 61-year-old Smolensk resident, Viktor Malkov, died three months after being released from an eight-month-long detention, partly because his chronic health problems were exacerbated by the denial of medical care in the detention center. Malkov, who was detained on the grounds of extremism due to his religious beliefs, had stated that prison officials did not allow him to seek proper treatment or medications for his heart disease and kidney problems.

NGOs reported approximately 50 percent of prisoners with HIV did not receive adequate treatment. Only prisoners with a CD4 white-blood cell level below a certain amount were provided treatment. NGOs reported that interruptions in the supplies of some antiretroviral drugs were sometimes a problem.

There were reports political prisoners were placed in particularly harsh conditions and subjected to punitive treatment within the prison system, such as solitary confinement or punitive stays in psychiatric units. For example, on May 21, a court ordered the forced psychiatric treatment of Kamchatka opposition activist Vladimir Shumanin during a criminal prosecution for libel stemming from a 2018 article in which he accused a law enforcement officer of engaging in criminal behavior. In the Far East region, Shumanin was known for running a personal YouTube channel in which he sharply criticized regional and federal authorities.

Administration: Convicted inmates and individuals in pretrial detention have visitation rights, but authorities may deny visitation depending on circumstances. By law prisoners with harsher sentences are allowed fewer visitation rights. The judge in a prisoner’s case may deny the prisoner visitation. Authorities may also prohibit relatives deemed a security risk from visiting prisoners. Some pretrial detainees believed authorities sometimes denied visitation and telephone access to pressure them into providing confessions.

While prisoners may file complaints with public oversight commissions or with the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsperson, they often did not do so due to fear of reprisal. Prison reform activists reported that only prisoners who believed they had no other option risked the consequences of filing a complaint. Complaints that reached the oversight commissions often focused on minor personal requests.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities permitted representatives of public oversight commissions to visit prisons regularly to monitor conditions. According to the Public Chamber, there were public oversight commissions in almost all regions. Human rights activists expressed concern that some members of the commissions were individuals close to authorities and included persons with law enforcement backgrounds.

By law members of oversight commissions have the right to videotape and photograph inmates in detention facilities and prisons with their written approval. Commission members may also collect air samples, conduct other environmental inspections, conduct safety evaluations, and access prison psychiatric facilities. The law permits human rights activists not listed in public oversight commissions to visit detentions centers and prisons. The NGO Interregional Center for Women’s Support, working with detained migrants, noted that only after a specific detainee submits a request and contacts the NGO may the organization obtain permission to visit a certain detention center.

Authorities allowed the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture to visit the country’s prisons and release some reports on conditions but continued to withhold permission for it to release all recent reports.

There were reports of authorities prosecuting journalists for reporting torture. For example, in September, three penal colonies in Kemerovo Oblast (IK-5, IK-22, and IK-37) filed a lawsuit for reputational protection against a number of former prisoners and civic activists, including journalist Andrey Novashov, who in June published an article on the news website *Sibir.Realii* exposing inmates’ allegations of torture in the three colonies.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

While the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, authorities engaged in these practices with impunity. The law provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention, but successful challenges were rare.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

By law authorities may arrest and hold a suspect for up to 48 hours without court approval, provided there is evidence of a crime or a witness; otherwise, an arrest warrant is required. The law requires judicial approval of arrest warrants, searches, seizures, and detentions. Officials generally honored this requirement, although bribery or political pressure sometimes subverted the process of obtaining judicial warrants. After an arrest, police typically took detainees to the nearest police station, where they informed them of their rights. Police must prepare a protocol stating the grounds for the arrest, and both the detainee and police officer must sign it within three hours of detention. Police must interrogate detainees within the first 24 hours of detention. Prior to interrogation, a detainee has the right to meet with an attorney for two hours. No later than 12 hours after detention, police must notify the prosecutor. They must also give the detainee an opportunity to notify his or her relatives by telephone unless a prosecutor issues a warrant to keep the detention secret. Police are required to release a detainee after 48 hours, subject to bail conditions, unless a court decides, at a hearing, to prolong custody in response to a motion filed by police not less than eight hours before the 48-hour detention period expires. The defendant and his or her attorney must be present at the court hearing, either in person or through a video link.

Except in the North Caucasus, authorities generally respected the legal limitations on detention. There were reports of occasional noncompliance with the 48-hour limit for holding a detainee. At times authorities failed to issue an official detention protocol within the required three hours after detention and held suspects longer than the legal detention limits.

By law police must complete their investigation and transfer a case to a prosecutor for arraignment within two months of a suspect’s arrest, although an investigative authority may extend a criminal investigation for up to 12 months. Extensions beyond 12 months need the approval of the head federal investigative authority in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, or the Investigative Committee and the approval of the court. According to some defense lawyers, the two-month time limit often was exceeded, especially in cases with a high degree of public interest.

Problems existed related to detainees’ ability to obtain adequate defense counsel. The law provides defendants the right to choose their own lawyers, but investigators sometimes did not respect this provision, instead designating lawyers friendly to the prosecution. These “pocket” defense attorneys agreed to the interrogation of their clients in their presence while making no effort to defend their clients’ legal rights. In many cases especially in more remote regions, defense counsel was not available for indigent defendants. Judges usually did not suppress confessions taken without a lawyer present. Judges at times freed suspects held in excess of detention limits, although they usually granted prosecutors’ motions to extend detention periods.

There were reports that security services sometimes held detainees in incommunicado detention before officially registering the detention. This practice usually coincided with allegations of the use of torture to coerce confessions before detainees were permitted access to a lawyer. The problem was especially acute in the Republic of Chechnya, where such incommunicado detention could reportedly last for weeks in some cases.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were many reports of arbitrary arrest or detention, often in connection with demonstrations and single-person pickets, such as those that preceded and succeeded the July 1 national vote on constitutional amendments (see section 2.b.). The independent human rights media project *OVD-Info* reported that during the first six months of the year, police detained 388 single-person picketers in Moscow and St. Petersburg alone, although single-person pickets are legal and do not require a permit. After *Novaya Gazeta* journalist and municipal deputy

Ilya Azar was arrested and sentenced to 15 days of administrative arrest on May 26 for holding a single-person picket in Moscow, law enforcement authorities detained an estimated 130 individuals who took part in protests supporting him in three cities. Many of them were fined for violating the laws on staging public demonstrations.

There were reports that Russian-led forces and Russian occupation authorities in Ukraine engaged in arbitrary detention (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine).

Pretrial Detention: Observers noted lengthy pretrial detention was a problem, but data on its extent were not available. By law pretrial detention may not normally exceed two months, but the court has the power to extend it to six months, as well as to 12 or 18 months if the crime of which the defendant is accused is especially serious. For example, Yuliy Boyarshinov, described by Memorial as an antifascist and left-wing activist, was in pretrial detention from 2018 until the resumption of his trial in February; he was convicted and sentenced to 5.5 years in prison in June. He was accused of illegally storing explosives and participating in a terrorist organization because of his purported association with the “Network,” an alleged antifascist and anarchist group that relatives of the accused claim does not really exist. Memorial considered Boyarshinov to be a political prisoner.

Detainee’s Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: By law a detainee may challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court. In view of problems with judicial independence (see section 1.e.), however, judges typically agreed with the investigator and dismissed defendants’ complaints.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but judges remained subject to influence from the executive branch, the armed forces, and other security forces, particularly in high-profile or politically sensitive cases, as well as to corruption. The outcomes of some trials appeared predetermined. Acquittal rates remained extremely low. In 2019 courts acquitted 0.36 percent of all defendants.

There were reports of pressure on defense attorneys representing clients who were being subjected to politically motivated prosecution and other forms of reprisal. According to a June 2019 report from the Agora International Human Rights Group, it has become common practice for judges to remove defense attorneys from court hearings without a legitimate basis in retaliation for their providing clients with an effective defense. The report also documented a trend of law enforcement authorities’ using physical force to interfere with the work of defense attorneys, including the use of violence to prevent them from being present during searches and interrogations.

On August 7, the bar association of the Leningrad region opened disciplinary proceedings against Yevgeniy Smirnov, a lawyer from Team 29, an informal association of lawyers and journalists dedicated to protecting civil liberties. Smirnov was one of the lawyers representing journalist Ivan Safronov in a high-profile treason case. His colleagues believed that the disciplinary proceedings were retaliation for his work.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but executive interference with the judiciary and judicial corruption undermined this right.

The defendant has a legal presumption of innocence and the right to a fair, timely, and public trial, but these rights were not always respected. Defendants have the right to be informed promptly of charges and to be present at the trial. The law provides for the appointment of an attorney free of charge if a defendant cannot afford one, although the high cost of legal service meant that lower-income defendants often lacked competent representation. A Yekaterinburg-based legal and human rights NGO indicated many defense attorneys do not vigorously defend their clients and that there were few qualified defense attorneys in remote areas of the country. Defense attorneys may visit their clients in detention, although defense lawyers claimed authorities electronically monitored their conversations and did not always provide them access to their clients. Prior to trial, defendants receive a copy of their indictment, which describes the charges against them in detail. They also may review their file following the completion of the criminal investigation.

Non-Russian defendants have the right to free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals, although the quality of interpretation is typically poor. During trial the defense is not required to present evidence and is given an opportunity to cross-examine witnesses and call defense witnesses, although judges may deny the defense this opportunity. Defendants have the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants have the right of appeal.

The law provides for trial by jury in criminal cases if the defendant is charged with murder, kidnapping, narcotics smuggling, and certain other serious crimes. Nonetheless, trials by jury remained rare, and the vast majority of verdicts and sentences are rendered by judges. The acquittal rate in trials by jury is much higher (23 percent in 2019) than in trials before a judge (0.36 percent in 2019), although acquittals by jury are sometimes overturned by judges in appellate courts.

The law allows prosecutors to appeal acquittals, which they did in most cases. Prosecutors may also appeal what they regard as lenient sentences. In April 2018, a court in Petrozavodsk acquitted renowned historian of the gulag and human rights activist Yuriy Dmitriyev of child pornography charges, a case many observers believed to be politically motivated and in retaliation for his efforts to expose Stalin-era crimes. In June 2018 the Supreme Court of the Republic of Karelia granted the prosecutor’s appeal of the acquittal and sent the case for retrial. In the same

month, Dmitriyev was again arrested. On July 22, the Petrozavodsk City Court found him guilty of sexual abuse of a minor and sentenced him to 3.5 years in prison. On September 29, the Supreme Court of Karelia overturned the decision and extended his sentence to 13 years in maximum-security prison. Memorial considered Dmitriyev to be a political prisoner.

Authorities particularly infringed on the right to a fair trial in Chechnya, where observers noted that the judicial system served as a means of conducting reprisals against those who exposed wrongdoing by Chechnya head Kadyrov.

In some cases judicial authorities imposed sentences disproportionate to the crimes charged. For example, on August 18, political commentator Fyodor Krasheninnikov was sentenced to seven days in jail for publishing comments criticizing the Constitutional Court. The Sverdlovsk Oblast human rights ombudswoman responded that Krasheninnikov should only have been fined. Krasheninnikov filed a complaint with European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), asserting that his arrest violated his rights of speech, fair trial, and personal freedom.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were credible reports of political prisoners in the country and that authorities detained and prosecuted individuals for political reasons. Charges usually applied in politically motivated cases included “terrorism,” “extremism,” “separatism,” and “espionage.” Political prisoners were reportedly placed in particularly harsh conditions of confinement and subjected to other punitive treatment within the prison system, such as solitary confinement or punitive stays in psychiatric units.

As of December Memorial’s list of political prisoners contained 358 names, including 295 individuals who were allegedly wrongfully imprisoned for exercising religious freedom. Nevertheless, Memorial estimated that the actual number of political prisoners in the country could be two to three times greater than the number on its list. Memorial’s list included journalists jailed for their writing, such as Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev (see section 2.a.); human rights activists jailed for their work, such as Yuriy Dmitriyev; many Ukrainians (including Crimean Tatars) imprisoned for their vocal opposition to the country’s occupation of Crimea; Anastasiya Shevchenko, the first individual charged under the “undesirable foreign organizations” law; students and activists jailed for participating in the Moscow protests in July and August 2019; and members of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious believers. Memorial noted the average length of sentences for the cases on their list continued to increase, from 5.3 years for political prisoners and 6.6 years for religious prisoners in 2016 to 6.8 and 9.1 years, respectively, in 2018. In some cases sentences were significantly longer, such as the case of Aleksey Pichugin, a former security official of the Russian oil company Yukos, imprisoned since 2003 with a life sentence for conviction of alleged involvement in murder and murder attempts; human rights organizations asserted that his detention was politically motivated to obtain false evidence against Yukos executives.

Politically Motivated Reprisal Against Individuals Located Outside the Country

There were credible reports that the country attempted to misuse international law enforcement tools for politically motivated purposes as a reprisal against specific individuals located outside the country. Authorities used their access to the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) to target political enemies abroad. For example, the religious freedom rights organization Forum 18 reported that the country issued Interpol red notices in January to secure the extradition of at least two individuals facing “extremism” charges for exercising their freedom of religion or belief. Ashurali Magomedeminov, who studied the work of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi, left Russia in 2016; the Investigative Committee launched a criminal case against him in 2017 after accusing him of sharing “extremist literature.”

There were credible reports that, for politically motivated purposes, the government attempted to exert bilateral pressure on another country aimed at having it take adverse action against specific individuals. For example, on February 21, Belarusian police detained Nikolay Makhlichev, a member of Jehovah’s Witnesses, at the request of the Russian authorities. Makhlichev said that Belarusian police told him that Russian authorities had put him on an interstate wanted list after they opened a criminal case against him for “extremism” for his religious affiliation. Russian prosecutors brought forth a request for extradition, but on April 7, the Belarusian courts determined that he would not be extradited.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Although the law provides mechanisms for individuals to file lawsuits against authorities for human rights violations, these mechanisms often did not work well. For example, the law provides that a defendant who has been acquitted after a trial has the right to compensation from the government. While this legal mechanism exists in principle, it was practically very cumbersome to use. Persons who believed their human rights were violated typically sought redress in the ECHR after domestic courts ruled against them. Amendments to the constitution approved in a nationwide vote on July 1, and signed into law on December 8, enshrined the primacy of Russian law over international law, stating that decisions by interstate bodies interpreted in a manner contrary to the constitution are not enforceable in the country. Many experts interpreted this to mean that courts have greater power to ignore rulings from international human rights bodies, including the ECHR; the courts had already set a precedent by declaring such bodies’ decisions “nonexecutable.”

Property Restitution

The country has endorsed the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Restitution but declined to endorse the 2010 Guidelines and Best Practices. There is no legislation or special mechanism in the country that addresses the restitution of or compensation for private property; the same is true for heirless property. The government has laws in place providing for the restitution of cultural property, but according to the laws’ provisions, claims may only be made by states and not individuals.

For information regarding Holocaust-era property restitution and related issues, please see the Department of State’s Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly on July 29, at <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law forbids officials from entering a private residence except in cases prescribed by federal law or when authorized by a judicial decision. The law also prohibits the collection, storage, utilization, and dissemination of information about a person’s private life without his or her consent. While the law previously prohibited government monitoring of correspondence, telephone conversations, and other means of communication without a warrant, those legal protections were significantly weakened by laws passed since 2016 granting authorities sweeping powers and requiring telecommunications providers to store all electronic and telecommunication data (see section 2.a., Internet Freedom). Politicians from minority parties, NGOs, human rights activists, and journalists alleged that authorities routinely employed surveillance and other measures to spy on and intimidate citizens.

Law enforcement agencies required telecommunications providers to grant the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB continuous remote access to client databases, including telephone and electronic communications, enabling them to track private communications and monitor internet activity without the provider’s knowledge. The law permits authorities with a warrant to monitor telephone calls in real time, but this safeguard was largely pro forma. The Ministry of Information and Communication requires telecommunications service providers to allow the FSB to tap telephones and monitor the internet. The Ministry of Information and Communication maintained that authorities would not access information without a court order, although the FSB is not required to show it upon request.

In January a *Novaya Gazeta* investigation revealed that personnel of the Internal Affairs Ministry’s antiextremism division had installed a secret video camera in 2018 in the bedroom of Anastasiya Shevchenko, an Open Russia activist facing criminal charges for participating in an “undesirable” organization. The camera recorded her for five months without her knowledge.

The law requires explicit consent for governmental and private collection of biometric data via facial recognition technology. Laws on public security and crime prevention, however, provide for exceptions to this consent requirement. Human rights activists claimed the law lacks appropriate safeguards to prevent the misuse of these data, especially without any judicial or public oversight over surveillance methods and technologies.

As of September almost 200,000 government surveillance cameras have been installed in Moscow and equipped with Russian-developed automated facial recognition software as part of its Safe City program. The system was initially installed in key public places, such as metro stations and apartment entrances, in order to scan crowds against a database of wanted individuals. The first major test of this system occurred in the spring, as the Moscow city government began enforcing mandatory COVID-19 self-isolation requirements using facial recognition. The personal data of residents and international visitors placed under quarantine in Moscow were reportedly uploaded into the system in order to monitor the public for self-isolation violations. The Moscow city government announced that additional cameras would be installed throughout the city, including in one-quarter of the city’s 6,000 metro cars, by the end of the year.

In July, two activists, Alyona Popova and Vladimir Milov, filed a complaint against the country’s facial recognition program with the ECHR. Popova and Milov claimed closed-circuit television cameras were used during a large September 2019 protest in Moscow to conduct mass surveillance of the participants. They claimed that the government’s collection of protesters’ unique biometric data through the use of facial recognition technology violated the right to privacy and freedom of assembly provided for in the European Convention on Human Rights. Popova and Milov also argued the use of the technology at an opposition rally amounted to discrimination based on political views. The pair had previously filed a complaint in a local Moscow court, which was dismissed in March when the court ruled the government’s use of the technology legal.

On May 21, the State Duma adopted a law to create a unified federal register containing information on all the country’s residents, including their names, dates and places of birth, and marital status. According to press reports, intelligence and security services would have access to the database in their investigations. There were reports that authorities threatened to remove children from the custody of parents engaged in political activism or some forms of religious worship, or parents who were LGBTI persons. For example, on October 2, Russian media reported that authorities were threatening to arrest and take away the children of gay men who have fathered their children through surrogacy, accusing them of child trafficking. Several families reportedly left the country due to fear of arrest. As of December no formal arrest related to this threat had been reported.

The law requires relatives of terrorists to pay the cost of damages caused by an attack, which human rights advocates criticized as collective punishment. Chechen Republic authorities reportedly routinely imposed collective punishment on the relatives of alleged terrorists, including by expelling them from the republic.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

While the constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, the government increasingly restricted this right. Regional and local authorities used procedural violations and restrictive or vague legislation to detain, harass, or prosecute persons who criticized the government or institutions it favored. The government exercised editorial control over media, creating a media landscape in which most citizens were exposed to predominantly government-approved narratives. Significant government pressure on independent media constrained coverage of numerous topics, especially of Belarus, LGBTI persons, the environment, elections, COVID-19, criticism of local or federal leadership, as well as secessionism or federalism. The government used direct ownership or ownership by large private companies with government links to control or influence major national media and regional media outlets, especially television. Censorship and self-censorship in television and print media and on the internet was widespread, particularly regarding points of view critical of the government or its policies. The government’s failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters further stifled freedom of assembly and association.

Freedom of Speech: Authorities continued to misuse the country’s expansive definition of extremism, under which citizens may be punished for certain types of peaceful protests, affiliation with certain religious denominations, and even certain social media posts, as a tool to stifle dissent. As of August the Ministry of Justice had expanded its list of extremist materials to include 5,080 books, videos, websites, social media pages, musical compositions, and other items, an increase of approximately 80 items from 2019. According to the prosecutor general, authorities prosecuted 585 extremism cases in 2019, the majority of which included charges of “extremism” levied against individuals for exercising free speech on social media and elsewhere.

On March 27, the State Duma passed legislation criminalizing the dissemination of false “socially significant information” online, in mass media, or during protests or public events. This law in effect toughened a March 2019 law that prohibited the dissemination of “incorrect socially meaningful information, distributed under the guise of correct information, which creates the threat of damage to the lives and health of citizens or property, the threat of mass disruption of public order and public security, or the threat of the creation of an impediment to the functioning of life support facilities, transport infrastructure, banking, energy, industry, or communications.” Authorities used the law to target human rights defenders and civil society activists in criminal investigations, most recently by accusing them of spreading unreliable information related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On June 15, Agora International Human Right Group published a report showing that over the course of 450 days, authorities initiated approximately 200 cases against the dissemination of “unreliable socially significant information.” A total of 33 of the cases were filed between April 3 and June 9 and involved criminal complaints that mainly targeted activists, journalists, bloggers, and legislators.

In early May prosecutors opened a criminal investigation into the activities of Grigoriy Vinter, the head of the Vologda chapter of the NGO For Human Rights, after posts criticizing authorities for transporting prisoners who showed COVID-19 symptoms were published on a social media page that he administered. Vinter had previously faced similar politically motivated investigations for his human rights advocacy.

By law authorities may close any organization a court determines to be extremist, including media outlets and websites. Roskomnadzor, the country’s media oversight agency, routinely issued warnings to newspapers and internet outlets it suspected of publishing extremist materials. Three warnings in one year sufficed to initiate a closure lawsuit.

During the year authorities invoked a 2013 law prohibiting the distribution of “propaganda on nontraditional sexual relations” to minors to punish the exercise of free speech by LGBTI persons and their supporters. For example, Russian media reported that on July 10, LGBTI artist and activist Yuliya Tsvetkova was fined by a local court in the Russian Far East for social media posts and drawings depicting same-sex couples with their children, rainbow-colored cats, and matryoshka dolls holding hands. Tsvetkova was also under investigation for spreading pornography among minors for her body-positive projects in 2019. On September 22, her case was returned to the Investigative Committee for Khabarovsk Krai for further investigation in what experts believe was an attempt to prolong the trial.

Authorities investigated individuals for speech allegedly violating a law that prohibits “offending the feelings of religious believers.” For example, at the end of January, popular stand-up comic Aleksandr Dolgoplov left the country after police opened an investigation into one of his performances from 2019. Media reported that an audience member complained that Dolgoplov had insulted his religious feelings, possibly with a joke about Jesus and his mother Mary. In March, Dolgoplov announced that he had returned to Russia; the status of the investigation was unclear.

During the year authorities prosecuted individuals for speech that allegedly violated the law prohibiting the “rehabilitation of Nazism.” On August 8, media reported that the Investigative Committee opened a case against Voronezh resident Aleksandr Khoroshiltsev for posting a photo of Adolf Hitler on the website of the Immortal Regiment, the name given to the yearly procession of individuals with portraits of relatives who fought in World War II. Authorities told journalists that posts such as Khoroshiltsev’s were aimed at rehabilitating the Nazi regime.

The law bans the display of Nazi symbols and the symbols of groups placed on the government’s list of “extremist” organizations. There was no official register or list of banned symbols. On May 15, a district court in Kemerovo sentenced Vladislav Koretskiy, an 18-year-old student, to 10 days incarceration for publishing social media posts in 2016 and 2017 containing images of swastikas.

The law prohibits showing “disrespect” online for the state, authorities, the public, flag, or constitution. For example, on March 3, a district court in Tomsk fined activist Sergey Chaykovskiy, the executive director of the National Bureau for the Development of Democracy, for an Instagram post that showed a speech by Nancy Pelosi accusing Putin of interfering in the conflict in Ukraine. Chaykovskiy captioned the post “Vladimir Putin will answer for his crimes in Ukraine” and was found guilty of disrespecting authorities online.

During the year authorities enforced a law prohibiting the “propaganda of narcotics” to prosecute or threaten to block independent outlets. For example, in January the Supreme Court upheld lower court orders to block the distribution of an article by independent journalists chronicling the story of a heroin user. Free speech advocates expressed concern that the law allowed the government to ban any nonfiction article on drug use it deemed inappropriate.

During the year authorities used a law banning cooperation with “undesirable foreign organizations” to restrict free expression. For example, in March authorities opened an administrative case against the Andrey Rylkov Foundation for publishing a text from the Open Russia movement on its website. Prosecutors accused the foundation, which aids drug addicts and advocates for changes to laws on narcotics, of cooperating with an “undesirable foreign organization.”

Government-controlled media frequently used derogatory terms such as “traitor,” “foreign agent,” and “fifth column” to describe individuals expressing views critical of or different from government policy, leading to a societal climate intolerant of dissent.

Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media: The government continued to restrict press and media freedom. More than 80 percent of country’s mass media was funded by the government or progovernment actors. Government-friendly oligarchs owned most other outlets, which are permitted to determine what they publish within formal or informal boundaries set by the government. In the regions each governor also controlled regional media through direct or indirect funding or through affiliated structures. The federal government or progovernment individuals completely or partially owned all so-called federal television channels, the only stations with nationwide reach. The 29 most-watched stations together commanded 86 percent of television viewership; all were owned at least in part by the federal or local governments or by progovernment individuals. Government-owned media outlets often received preferential benefits, such as rent-free occupancy of government-owned buildings, and a preferential tax rate. On a regional level, state-owned and progovernment television channels received subsidies from the Ministry of Finance for broadcasting in cities with a population of less than 100,000 and on the creation and production of content. At many government-owned or -controlled outlets, the state increasingly dictated editorial policy. While the law restricts foreign ownership of media outlets to no more than 20 percent, another provision of the ambiguously worded law apparently bans foreign ownership entirely. The government used these provisions to consolidate ownership of independent outlets under progovernment oligarchs and to exert pressure on outlets that retained foreign backers. In its annual report on freedom of the press, Freedom House rated the country “not free.”

By law the Ministry of Justice is required to maintain a list of media outlets that are designated “foreign agents.” As of August there were 11 outlets listed. The decision to designate media outlets as foreign agents may be made outside of court by other government bodies, including law enforcement agencies.

The law allows authorities to label individuals (both Russian and foreign citizens) as “foreign agents” if they disseminate foreign media to an unspecified number of persons and receive funding from abroad. Human rights defenders expressed concern that this legislation would be used to further restrict the activities of or selectively punish journalists, bloggers, and social media users. Individuals labeled a “foreign agent” are required to register with the Ministry of Justice, and those living abroad also must create and register a legal entity inside the country in order to publish materials inside the country. All information published by the “foreign agent” individual must be marked as having been produced by a “foreign agent.” Fines for noncompliance with the law range from 10,000 to five million rubles (\$133 to \$66,500).

A parliamentary commission investigated alleged foreign interference into Russian domestic affairs. After the September 13 regional elections, the commission reported that “foreign agent” NGOs tried to discredit the election and undermine the confidence of Russians in the democratic procedures. According to the commission, the interference tactics were diverse and included disinformation on social networks and round-the-clock hacker attacks on the servers of the Russian Central Election Commission.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists continued to be subjected to arrest, imprisonment, physical attack, harassment, and intimidation as a result of their reporting. According to the Glasnost Defense Foundation, as of December incidents of violence and harassment against journalists included one killing, 42 attacks, 97 detentions by law enforcement officers, 46 prosecutions, 27 threats, and six politically motivated firings. Journalists and bloggers who uncovered government malfeasance or who criticized the government often faced harassment, either in the form of direct threats to their physical safety or threats to their livelihood, frequently through legal prosecution.

There were reports of attacks on journalists by government officials and police. For example, according to press reports, on June 30, a police officer severely injured David Frenkel, a journalist with the independent *MediaZona* outlet, as he was reporting on the nationwide vote on constitutional amendments in St. Petersburg. Frenkel was at a polling station investigating alleged violations of voting procedure. The head of the local voting commission requested that police remove Frenkel from the premises for purportedly interrupting the polling station's work. A video widely circulated on social media showed the police officer tackling Frenkel, breaking his collarbone in the process. Frenkel was charged with three administrative offenses for allegedly interfering with the election commission's work, ignoring police orders, and violating COVID-19 restrictions. Frenkel was eventually fined a nominal sum for the violations. His fines were upheld on appeal. Frenkel filed a lawsuit against the police officer involved; a preliminary investigation of the officer's actions was reportedly launched but found no grounds for the opening of a case.

There were reports of police briefly detaining journalists to interfere with or punish them for their reporting. For example, on May 5, *OVD-Info* reported that police detained journalist Sergey Poznyakov as he was traveling to the editorial office of the newspaper *Communists of Russia*, where he worked as a correspondent. Police claimed they detained him because he did not show his documents, although Poznyakov asserted that he did. Police allegedly blocked the entrance to the newspaper's office for five days, possibly in retaliation for its staff releasing red balloons, a symbolic gesture to communism, during a May Day celebration.

There were reports of police framing journalists for serious crimes to interfere with or punish them for their reporting. For example, Ivan Safronov, a former national security journalist for major national daily newspapers *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti*, was arrested by the FSB and charged with treason in July. Safronov was working as an aide to the head of the Russian space agency, Roscosmos, at the time of his arrest. The charges alleged Safronov was recruited by Czech intelligence agents in 2012 to pass sensitive Russian military information to another foreign government. Observers speculated the charges might be related to a 2017 *Kommersant* article coauthored by Safronov, detailing the potential sale of Russian military aircraft to Egypt. Safronov also provoked a strong reaction from the government for a 2019 article in *Kommersant* speculating on a shakeup of the leadership in the Federation Council. Safronov was subsequently fired from *Kommersant*, according to some accounts, due to government pressure on the publisher. Safronov's supporters noted the treason charges complicated his defense in that independent examination of the evidence would likely be impossible. If convicted, Safronov faces up to 20 years in prison. As of December Safronov remained in custody.

There were reports of police raids on the offices of independent media outlets that observers believed were designed to punish or pressure the outlets. For example, in July police raided the offices and private homes of the opposition organization MBK Media and its associated human rights foundation, Open Russia. These raids were ostensibly connected to the continuing investigation of the Russian groups' founder, Mikhail Khodorkovskiy, for alleged tax violations in 2003. Independent journalists believed the raids were actually tied to planned protests against recent constitutional amendments. MBK Media representatives pointed out that many of the staff members were only children in 2003, emphasizing their view that the raids were intended to interfere with their work.

In another example, in January Leonid Krivenkov, a retired cameraman for a major Russian state television broadcaster, was severely beaten by two unknown assailants. The attack came several weeks after Krivenkov gave multiple interviews detailing political censorship and corruption at the broadcaster. Krivenkov alleged the two men disparaged him for not respecting his homeland as they beat him. He was treated for a broken nose and severe bruising.

On October 15, journalist Sergey Plotnikov was abducted and beaten by unidentified persons in Khabarovsk, where he had been reporting on continuing protests in the city. He was reportedly handcuffed, driven into the forest outside the city, and threatened by shooting live rounds of ammunition into the ground near his feet. Plotnikov sustained a wound on his temple and was released the following morning.

Journalists reported threats in connection with their reporting. On April 13, Chechnya head Kadyrov posted a video statement on social media condemning *Novaya Gazeta* over an article alleging that local authorities' response to COVID-19 was abusive. Kadyrov made death threats against the newspaper, stating that Russian authorities needed to stop *Novaya Gazeta* journalists before Chechen authorities would be forced to "commit a crime." The article's author, Yelena Milashina, had previously suffered an attack in Chechnya in February after she was ambushed and beaten by unknown assailants at her hotel. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov dismissed Kadyrov's statement by saying that there was nothing out of the ordinary in Kadyrov's reaction to Milashina's reporting. On September 29, a Moscow court fined *Novaya Gazeta* for disseminating "fake" information in the article.

There was no progress during the year in establishing accountability in a number of high-profile killings of journalists, including the 2004 killing of Paul Klebnikov, the 2006 killing of Anna Politkovskaya, and the 2009 killing of Natalia Estemirova.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government directly and indirectly censored media, much of which occurred online (also see section 2.a., Internet Freedom and Academic Freedom and Cultural Events).

There were reports that the government retaliated against those who produced or published content it disliked. For example, the founder and editor of the independent news site *Koza.Press*, Irina Murakhtayeva (known professionally as Irina Slavina), was subjected to various forms of harassment and substantial fines by law enforcement in recent years. On October 1, law enforcement officers forcibly entered her Nizhny Novgorod apartment, ostensibly with a

search warrant related to the civil society organization Open Russia. On October 2, Murakhtayeva committed suicide by self-immolation outside a regional Ministry of Internal Affairs building, writing on Facebook, “For my death, please blame the Russian Federation.”

There were reports that the government placed restrictions on printing presses to prevent them from printing materials for the political opposition. For example, on June 23, the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ center for combating extremism searched a printing house in St. Petersburg. Authorities detained three activists who ordered leaflets that opposed proposed constitutional amendments and criticized President Putin. The activists were charged under an article on production or distribution of campaign materials in violation of the law during elections and referenda.

Self-censorship in independent media was also reportedly widespread.

Libel/Slander Laws: Officials at all levels used their authority to restrict the work of and to retaliate against journalists and bloggers who criticized them, including taking legal action for alleged slander or libel, which are criminal offenses. For example, on June 15, the Investigative Committee opened a criminal libel case against anticorruption crusader, opposition activist, and prominent blogger Aleksey Navalny after he used social media to criticize a WWII veteran’s participation in a propaganda video supporting President Putin’s constitutional amendments package. Navalny faced penalties ranging from a substantial monetary fine to 240 hours of community service if convicted.

National Security: Authorities cited laws against terrorism or protecting national security to arrest or punish critics of the government or deter criticism of government policies or officials. For example, on September 9, Russian military historian Andrey Zhukov was convicted of high treason and sentenced to 12.5 years in prison. Zhukov was arrested in 2018 on allegations linked to “the history of the Russian Armed Forces and his vigorous activity online.” According to Zhukov’s colleagues, his interests included the formation, reassignment, and deployment of the country’s military units from World War I to the present. Before his arrest, Zhukov was also researching participants in World War II, their relatives, and their military awards.

There were reports that authorities charged journalists with terrorism offenses in retaliation for their reporting. For example, in June 2019 security services in Dagestan arrested Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, a journalist and head of the religious affairs section of the independent newspaper *Chernovik*. *Chernovik* had long reported threats, politically motivated prosecutions, and other pressure for its work uncovering corruption and wrongdoing by local officials. In 2012 the newspaper’s editor in chief fled the country after receiving death threats, and its founder was shot 14 times outside the newspaper’s office in 2011, a crime that remained unsolved. Authorities charged Gadzhiyev and 10 codefendants with “taking part in the activities of a terrorist organization” and “organizing the financing of a terrorist organization” for purportedly diverting charitable donations to support the Islamic State in Syria. Conviction on the charges may result in up to 20 years’ imprisonment. Human rights defenders emphasized the charges were entirely based on a confession by a suspect who subsequently maintained that it was false and coerced, that Gadzhiyev had written critically of the Islamic State, and that there were other contradictions in the state’s case. They maintained that the case against him was fabricated. Gadzhiyev has remained in detention awaiting trial after a court repeatedly extended his pretrial detention. In April additional charges were filed against Gadzhiyev in Dagestan accusing him of participating in an extremist organization. The charges carry up to an additional 10 years in prison if Gadzhiyev is convicted. Memorial declared him to be a political prisoner.

There were reports that critics of the government’s counterterrorism policies were themselves charged with “justifying terrorism.” For example, on July 6, Pskov-based Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty contributor Svetlana Prokopyeva was convicted of “justifying terrorism” and fined in relation to a 2018 radio piece that delved into the motivations of a teenage suicide bomber who had attacked a regional FSB office. In the piece Prokopyeva discussed whether the country’s repressive political environment might have influenced the attack. Prosecutors sought a six-year prison sentence for Prokopyeva, who was ultimately required only to pay a fine and was able to avoid incarceration. As she had been charged under antiterrorism laws, however, Prokopyeva was placed on a government list of “terrorists and extremists,” barring her from foreign travel as a result.

Internet Freedom

The government monitored all internet communications (see also section 1.f.).

The law requires internet providers to install equipment to route web traffic through servers in the country. The government continued to employ its longstanding use of the System for Operative Investigative Activities, which requires internet service providers (ISPs) to install, at their own expense, a device that routes all customer traffic to an FSB terminal. The system enables police to track private email communications, identify internet users, and monitor their internet activity. Internet advocates asserted the measure allows for surveillance by intelligence agencies and enables state authorities to control information and block content. The law also envisions the creation of an independent domain name system (DNS) for the country, separate from the global DNS. In July the Account Chamber announced that the proposed plan to create an independent DNS did not meet its deadline, citing COVID-19 related delays.

The law requires domestic and foreign businesses to store citizens’ personal data on servers located in the country. Companies that ignore this requirement risk being fined, blocked, or both. The law provides that companies refusing to localize Russian users’ data may be subject to penalties ranging from 5,000 rubles (\$66) to six million rubles (\$78,700), with fines of up to 18 million rubles (\$236,000) for repeat offenses. In 2016 Roskomnadzor blocked access to the foreign-based professional networking website LinkedIn for failure to comply with the law; the service

remained unavailable in the country without a virtual private network (VPN) service. In February a Moscow district court fined Twitter and Facebook 4.7 million rubles (\$62,800) each for refusing to store the data of Russian users on servers located inside Russia. The two companies were also reportedly at risk of further fines for noncompliance with this requirement.

Telecommunications companies are required to store user data and make it available to law enforcement bodies. Companies are required to store users’ voice records for six months, and electronic correspondence (audio, images, and video) for three months.

Observers believed that the country’s security services were able to intercept and decode encrypted messages on at least some messaging platforms. The law requires telecommunications providers to provide authorities with “backdoors” around encryption technologies. Companies are fined up to six million rubles (\$79,300) if they refuse to provide the FSB with decryption keys that would allow them to read users’ correspondence. The government blocked access to content and otherwise censored the internet. Roskomnadzor maintained a federal blacklist of internet sites and required ISPs to block access to web pages that the agency deemed offensive or illegal, including information that was already prohibited, such as items on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The law gives the prosecutor general and Roskomnadzor authority to demand that ISPs block websites that promote extremist information and “mass public events that are conducted in violation of appropriate procedures.” According to the internet freedom NGO Roskomsvoboda, as of September a total of five million websites were unjustly blocked in the country. On August 10, a Moscow court fined Google for repeatedly failing to filter contents prohibited in Russia.

The law requires owners of internet search engines (news aggregators) with more than one million daily users to be accountable for the truthfulness of “publicly important” information before its dissemination. Authorities may demand that content deemed in violation be removed and impose heavy fines for refusal.

A law on the “right to be forgotten” allows individuals in the country to request that search-engine companies block search results that contain information about them. According to Freedom House’s 2020 *Freedom on the Net* report, the law was “routinely applied to require search engines to delete links to websites that contain personal information about an individual if it is no longer considered relevant.”

There was a growing trend of social media users being prosecuted for the political, religious, or other ideological content of posts, shares, and “likes,” which resulted in fines or prison sentences (see section 2.a., Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press).

The government prohibited online anonymity. The law requires commercial VPN services and internet anonymizers to block access to websites and internet content prohibited in the country. The law also authorizes law enforcement agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and FSB, to identify VPN services that do not comply with the ban by Roskomnadzor. By law Roskomnadzor may also block sites that provide instructions on how to circumvent government blocking. When the law came into force in 2017, Roskomnadzor announced that the majority of commercial VPNs and anonymizers used in the country had registered and intended to comply with the law, although most foreign-based VPNs had not. In March, Roskomnadzor announced the launch of an automated system for checking proxies, VPNs, and search engines for compliance with the requirements for blocking access to prohibited sites.

The law prohibits companies registered as “organizers of information dissemination,” including online messaging applications, from allowing anonymous users. Messaging applications and platforms that fail to comply with the requirements to restrict anonymous accounts may be blocked. In June 2019 authorities demanded that dating app Tinder provide messages and photos exchanged by users of the service.

There were reports of politically motivated cyberattacks. In March the Digital Revolution hackers group announced that the FSB had purchased the Fronton program, which allows for cyberattacks to crash servers and hack smart devices. On May 5, a political activist in St. Petersburg, Denis Mikhailov, reported a spam attack on the anniversary of an anti-Putin protest. Mikhailov noted that he received several hundred telephone calls from unknown numbers on that day.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government took further steps during the year to restrict academic freedom and cultural events.

There were reports that the government censored textbooks, curricula, and other school materials. For example, in January the state university Higher School of Economics (HSE) published amendments to its student rules and labor regulations. These changes limited the rights of students to make political statements on behalf of student groups, effectively prohibiting activities by students or faculty deemed “socially divisive” by university administrators. Student newspapers also lost their status as student groups at the university, eliminating their school funding. The policy changes were seen as a direct response to a number of high-profile student political protests and the appearance of an opposition leader on a student talk show in 2019.

There were reports that the government sanctioned academic personnel for their teachings, writing, research, or political views. In August the HSE decided not to renew the contracts of five lecturers due to the “reorganization” of the university. Among the lecturers was Kirill Martynov, a political correspondent for the independent *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper. Martynov claimed the official explanation for HSE’s failure to renew his contract was dubious,

suggesting that it was related to his journalistic work. The university also failed to renew the contract of world-renowned sociologist Ella Paneyakh. Media outlets reported that HSE administrators asked their faculty members not to criticize Russian authorities while publicly identifying with the university.

During the year authorities in Chechnya retaliated against artists for alleged lack of compliance with local traditions. In July Chechnya head Kadyrov announced that singers who appear in public (including at weddings) must have their lyrics approved by the Chechen Ministry of Culture and a special commission that checks them for compliance with “the Chechen mentality.”

In June a Moscow court convicted well-known theater director Kirill Serebrennikov of embezzlement and sentenced him to a fine, three years of probation, and a three-year ban on leading a state-funded cultural institution in Russia. Serebrennikov had been on trial since 2018 for embezzlement of state funds to stage a Shakespeare play that the government alleged he never produced. According to media outlets, however, the play had been staged more than 15 times, and observers believed the charges were politically motivated, citing Serebrennikov’s participation in antigovernment protests and criticism of government policies. The prosecution was widely seen by observers as a warning to the artistic community as a whole.

There were reports that authorities failed to protect performers and audiences from threats and physical attacks during cultural events they opposed. For example, on January 30, *The Economist* magazine reported that teatr.doc, an experimental theater company based in Moscow, was attacked by an ultraconservative group during a play that explored LGBTI themes. The agitators allegedly entered the theater, stopped the play, and shouted homophobic slurs. Police were called in and a fight broke out, but no charges were brought. On another occasion, bomb threats were called in to the theater, forcing the performance to stop and providing authorities an opportunity to check audience members’ documents.

There were reports that authorities forced the cancellation of concerts of musicians who had been critical of the government. In most cases the FSB or other security forces visited the music venues and “highly recommended” cancelation of the concerts, which the owners and managers understood as a veiled threat against the venue if they did not comply. For example, on January 28, *Novaya Gazeta* reported that the Prosecutor’s Office in the Kaluga region warned the organizers of a concert by the ska-punk band Distemper that the band’s lyrics contained “propaganda of radical anarchist views” and reminded them that they faced criminal liability for “incitement to extremist activity.” As a result the organizers decided to cancel the concert.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provides for freedom of assembly, but local authorities restricted this right. The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, or marches by more than one person to notify the government, although authorities maintained that protest organizers must receive government permission, not just provide notification. Failure to obtain official permission to hold a protest resulted in the demonstration being viewed as unlawful by law enforcement officials, who routinely dispersed such protests. While some public demonstrations took place, on many occasions local officials selectively denied groups permission to assemble or offered alternate venues that were inconveniently or remotely located. Many public demonstrations were restricted or banned due to COVID-19 measures. Each region enforced its own restrictions. As of September, Moscow and St. Petersburg had banned all mass events.

Although they do not require official approval, authorities restricted single-person pickets and required that there be at least 164 feet separating protesters from each other. In 2017 the Constitutional Court decreed that police officers may stop a single-person picket to protect the health and safety of the picketer. In July the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that single-person pickets are considered mass events and violate the COVID-19-related ban on mass gatherings.

The law requires that “motor rallies” and “tent city” gatherings in public places receive official permission. It requires gatherings that would interfere with pedestrian or vehicle traffic to receive official agreement 10 days prior to the event; those that do not affect traffic require three days’ notice. The law prohibits “mass rioting,” which includes teaching and learning about the organization of and participation in “mass riots.” The law allows authorities to prohibit nighttime demonstrations and meetings and levy fines for violating protest regulations and rules on holding public events.

The law provides heavy penalties for engaging in unsanctioned protests and other violations of public assembly law. Protesters convicted of multiple violations within six months may be fined substantially or imprisoned for up to five years. The law prohibits “involving a minor in participation in an unsanctioned gathering,” which is punishable by fines, 100 hours of community service, or arrest for up to 15 days.

Arrests or detentions for organizing or taking part in unsanctioned protests were common. The July 9 arrest of Khabarovsk Kray governor Sergey Furgal sparked more than four months of continuous protests in the region, with solidarity protests occurring in other Russian Far East cities including Vladivostok, Birobidzhan, and on Sakhalin Island. None of the protests was sanctioned by authorities. According to official Khabarovsk Kray statistics, between July 11 and September 6, a total of 4,126 citations were issued for drivers participating in motor rallies that

“interfered” with the flow of traffic, 173 citations were issued for participation in an unsanctioned meeting, and 22 individuals were detained. Among those detained and fined was Father Andrey, an Orthodox priest who did not chant slogans or hold placards. He received the largest fine during the series of protests and was detained for three days.

In another example, on April 20, authorities detained at least 69 protesters in North Ossetia’s capital, Vladikavkaz, who opposed the government’s policy imposing self-isolation due to public-health concerns. The 2,000-person protest demanded economic support during the pandemic.

Police often broke up protests that were not officially sanctioned, at times using disproportionate force. For example, on July 19, police officers reportedly severely beat Academy of Science biochemist Anton Rasin, who was participating in a march in Vladivostok in solidarity with the Khabarovsk protests. Rasin claimed officers beat him when he asked plainclothes officers to produce their identification. On July 20, he was convicted and sentenced to five days in jail by the court for failure to obey law enforcement directions.

Authorities regularly detained single-person picketers. For example, on April 26, police detained Andrey Boyarshinov in Kazan while standing in a single-person picket to protest the demolition of a prerevolutionary building. Police claimed that Boyarshinov was in violation of a self-isolation order in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association, but the government did not respect it. Public organizations must register their bylaws and the names of their leaders with the Ministry of Justice. The finances of registered organizations are subject to investigation by tax authorities, and foreign grants must be registered.

The government continued to use the “foreign agents” law, which requires NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in “political activity” to register as “foreign agents,” to harass, stigmatize, and, in some cases, halt their operation, although fewer organizations were registered than in previous years. As of December the Ministry of Justice’s registry of organizations designated as “foreign agents” included 75 NGOs. NGOs designated as “foreign agents” are banned by law from observing elections and face other restrictions on their activity.

For the purposes of implementing the foreign agents law, the government considered “political activities” to include: organizing public events, rallies, demonstrations, marches, and pickets; organizing and conducting public debates, discussions, or presentations; participating in election activities aimed at influencing the result, including election observation and forming commissions; public calls to influence local and state government bodies, including calling for changes to legislation; disseminating opinions and decisions of state bodies by technology; and attempting to shape public political views, including public opinion polls or other sociological research.

To be delisted, an NGO must submit an application to the Ministry of Justice proving that it did not receive any foreign funding or engage in any political activity within the previous 12 months. If the NGO received any foreign funding, it must have returned the money within three months. The ministry would then initiate an unscheduled inspection of the NGO to determine whether it qualified for removal from the list.

The law on “foreign agents” requires that NGOs identify themselves as “foreign agents” in all of their public materials. Authorities fined NGOs for failing to disclose their “foreign agent” status on websites or printed materials. For example, as of August the human rights NGO Memorial was fined at least 24 times for purported violations of the “foreign agents” law. The fines totaled more than five million rubles (\$66,500). On December 3, the Prosecutor General’s Office (PGO) initiated a search of Memorial’s Moscow headquarters to verify compliance with the “foreign agents” law. Media reported that the PGO’s “verification” would continue through December 29 and involve requests to review hundreds of documents, in what Memorial characterized as an effort to harass the NGO and hinder its work.

Organizations the government listed as “foreign agents” reported experiencing the social effects of stigmatization, such as being targeted by vandals and online criticism, in addition to losing partners and funding sources and being subjected to smear campaigns in the state-controlled press. At the same time, the “foreign agent” label did not necessarily exclude organizations from receiving state-sponsored support. As of September 2019, four NGOs labeled as “foreign agents” had received presidential grants for “socially oriented projects.”

The law requires the Ministry of Justice to maintain a list of “undesirable foreign organizations.” The list expanded during the year to 31 organizations, since the Ministry of Justice added the European Endowment for Democracy, the Jamestown Foundation, Project Harmony, Inc., seven organizations associated with Falun Gong, the Prague Civil Society Center, and the Association of Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe. By law a foreign organization may be found “undesirable” if it is deemed “dangerous to the foundations of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, its national security, and defense.” Authorities have not clarified what specific threats the “undesirable” NGOs posed to the country. Any foreign organization deemed “undesirable” must cease its activities. Any money or assets found by authorities may be seized, and any citizens found guilty of continuing to work with the organization in contravention of the law may face up to seven years in prison.

Authorities imposed criminal penalties for purported violations of the law on “undesirable foreign organizations.” On October 2, a Krasnodar court convicted and sentenced Yana Antonova, a pediatric surgeon and a former coordinator of Open Russia in Krasnodar, to 240 hours of forced labor for “participating” in activities of

“undesirable foreign organization.” Open Russia was declared an “undesirable foreign organization” in 2017. Authorities opened a criminal case against Antonova in March 2019 for reposting articles on her social media accounts and for conducting a single-person picket.

NGOs engaged in political activities or activities that purportedly “pose a threat to the country” or that received support from U.S. citizens or organizations are subject to suspension under the 2012 “Dima Yakovlev” law, which also prohibits NGOs from having members with dual Russian-U.S. citizenship.

Authorities continued to misuse the country’s expansive definition of extremism to stifle freedom of association. In 2017 the Supreme Court criminalized the activity of members of Jehovah’s Witnesses, prohibiting all activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ legal entities throughout the country and effectively banning their worship. The parent organization of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and its regional branches were placed on the Justice Ministry’s list of “extremist” groups, and members were subject to imprisonment, detention, house arrest, or criminal investigation participating in the activities of a “banned extremist organization” (see the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

There were reports civil society activists were beaten or attacked in retaliation for their professional activities and that in most cases law enforcement officials did not adequately investigate the incidents. For example, media outlets reported that on August 13 in St. Petersburg, Aleksandr Shurshev, a lawyer at the local office of Aleksey Navalny’s team, was beaten for the fourth time in a year. According to Shurshev, police did not respond to any of his reports of attacks.

In multiple cases, authorities arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted civil society activists in political retaliation for their work (see section 1.e.).

There were reports authorities targeted NGOs and activists representing the LGBTI community for retaliation (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but in some cases authorities restricted these rights.

In-country Movement: Although the law gives citizens the right to choose their place of residence, adult citizens must carry government-issued internal passports while traveling domestically and must register with local authorities after arriving at a different location. To have their files transferred, persons with official refugee or asylum status must notify the Ministry of Internal Affairs in advance of relocating to a district other than the one that originally granted them status. Authorities often refused to provide government services to individuals without internal passports or proper registration, and many regional governments continued to restrict this right through residential registration rules.

Authorities imposed in-country travel restrictions on individuals facing prosecution for political purposes.

Foreign Travel: The law provides for freedom to travel abroad, but the government restricted this right for certain groups. The law stipulates, for example, that a person who violates a court decision does not have a right to leave the country. A court may also prohibit a person from leaving the country for failure to satisfy debts; if the individual is suspected, accused, or convicted of a crime; or if the individual had access to classified material. The law allows for the temporary restriction of the right to leave the country for citizens with outstanding debts. According to press reports citing statistics from the Federal Bailiff Service, approximately 10 million Russians were unable to leave the country because of debts in 2019.

Since 2014 the government restricted the foreign travel of millions of its employees, prescribing which countries they are and are not allowed to visit. The restriction applies to employees of agencies including the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Federal Prison Service, the Federal Drug Control Service, the Federal Bailiff Service, the General Administration for Migration Issues (GAMI), and the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

Citizenship: There were reports that the government revoked citizenship on an arbitrary or discriminatory basis. For example, in April the Internal Affairs Ministry stripped the citizenship of Feliks Makhmadiyev and Konstantin Bazhenov, two members of Jehovah’s Witnesses convicted of “extremism” on the basis of their religious beliefs. Makhmadiyev was left stateless as a result. As of November Makhmadiyev was still serving a three-year prison term. In another case Yevgeniy Kim, who served more than three years in a Russian prison for conviction of “extremism,” was rendered stateless in January 2019 when Sverdlovsk region authorities canceled a 2005 decision to grant him citizenship after he had given up his Uzbek citizenship. Since his release in April 2019, Kim has been held in a migration detention center awaiting deportation to Uzbekistan, where authorities continued to refuse to accept him since he no longer held citizenship there.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) estimated the country was home to 5,300 internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of December 2019. Of the 5,300 IDPs, the IDMC asserted that 1,800 were due to conflict and violence.

According to the government’s official statistics, the number of “forced” migrants, which per government definition includes refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs, decreased from 9,485 in 2019 to 5,323 in June, of whom 1,085 were IDPs. The government indicated that the majority of forced migrants came from former Soviet republics, namely Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

Reliable information on whether the government promoted the safe, voluntary, dignified return, resettlement, or local integration of IDPs was not available. According to Svetlana Gannushkina from the independent NGOs Civic Assistance Committee and Memorial, most IDPs in the country were displaced by the Ossetian-Ingush conflict of 1992 and the Chechen wars in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. The Ossetian-Ingush conflict displaced Ingush people from the territory of North Ossetia-Alania, and the Chechen wars displaced Chechens. The government provided minimal financial support for housing to those who are registered as IDPs, but the Civic Assistance Committee criticized the government’s strict rules to qualify and the long line to wait for housing support.

f. Protection of Refugees

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported it had a working relationship with the government on asylum, refugee, and stateless persons problems. The Civic Assistance Committee reported, however, that the government failed to provide protection and assistance to IDPs, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: NGOs reported that police detained, fined, and threatened with deportation migrants, refugees, and stateless persons.

The government considered Ukrainian asylum seekers to be separate from asylum seekers from other countries, such as Afghanistan, Georgia, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen. In some cases temporary asylum holders who received refugee status from third countries were not granted exit visas or allowed to depart the country.

In March the country closed its borders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, trapping many migrants within the country. Many lost their jobs during that time and faced erratic and ad hoc repatriation measures. Lacking information and fearing the reintroduction of more stringent in-country travel restrictions, many found themselves on the street or stuck in makeshift camps near a transport hub until the country gradually opened up the borders after several months. For example, on September 21, Human Rights Watch reported on a temporary tent camp in the Samara region that housed approximately 4,500 Uzbek migrants who were waiting for a train to take them back to their country. Many had been there for months, living in extremely cramped, substandard conditions with no certainty of when they would be able to leave the country safely. On September 24, the department of the All-Russian Congress of Uzbekistan in the Samara region announced that these migrants were granted permission to leave the country by October 3.

Refoulement: The concept of nonrefoulement is not explicitly stated in the law. The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of persons to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The responsible agency, GAMI, did not maintain a presence at airports or other border points and did not adequately publicize that asylum seekers may request access to the agency. Asylum seekers had to rely on the goodwill of border guards and airline personnel to call immigration officials. Otherwise they faced immediate deportation to neighboring countries or return to their countries of origin, including in some cases to countries where they may have had reasonable grounds to fear persecution. While there were no statistics available on the number of persons subjected to such actions, in May the Civic Assistance Committee reported “the scale of expulsion of refugees must be considerable.”

Human rights groups continued to allege that authorities made improper use of international agreements that permit them to detain, and possibly repatriate, persons with outstanding arrest warrants from other former Soviet states. This system, enforced by informal ties among senior law enforcement officials of the countries concerned, permitted authorities to detain individuals for up to one month while the Prosecutor General’s Office investigated the nature of the warrants. International organizations reported six cases of refoulement of asylum seekers in 2018, and NGOs cited cases in which officials detained persons (most commonly from Central Asia) and returned them clandestinely to their country of origin.

In an example of clandestine repatriation, on September 1, Shobuddin Badalov, an activist from the Group 24 movement that is banned in Tajikistan, reportedly disappeared in Nizhny Novgorod. His lawyer and associates believed he was kidnapped and extradited without judicial process to Tajikistan. Badalov had been granted temporary asylum status in 2019. On October 3, the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that Badalov had voluntarily flown from Moscow’s Domodedovo International Airport to Dushanbe on September 1. On November 3, the government of Tajikistan confirmed Badalov’s detention in Tajikistan.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. NGOs reported applicants commonly paid informal “facilitation fees” of approximately 33,000 rubles (\$440) to GAMI adjudicators to have their application reviewed. Applicants who did not speak Russian often had to pay for a private interpreter. Human rights organizations noted that nearly all newly arrived asylum seekers in large cities, particularly Moscow and St. Petersburg, were forced to apply in other regions, allegedly due to full quotas. NGOs also noted difficulty in applying for asylum due to long queues and lack of clear application procedures. GAMI approved only a small percentage of applications for refugee status and temporary asylum, except for Ukrainians whose applications had a much higher chance of approval.

Human rights organizations noted the government’s issuance of refugee and temporary asylum status decreased steadily over the previous few years, pointing to the government’s systematic and arbitrary refusal to grant asylums. NGOs also reported that authorities encouraged applicants to return to their countries of origin.

Authorities reportedly also had blanket authority to grant temporary asylum to Syrians, but local migration experts noted a decrease in the number of Syrians afforded temporary asylum, suggesting that GAMI had not renewed the temporary asylum of hundreds of Syrians and, in some cases, encouraged applicants to return to Syria.

Employment: Employers frequently refused to hire applicants who lacked residential registration. UNHCR reported that employers frequently were not familiar with laws permitting employment for refugees without work permits and refused to hire them. NGOs reported that refugees and migrants were vulnerable to exploitation in the form of forced labor because of the lack of proper documents and insufficient Russian language skills.

Access to Basic Services: By law successful temporary asylum seekers and persons whose applications were being processed have the right to work, to receive medical care, and to attend school. NGOs reported authorities provided some services to Ukrainian asylum seekers, but there were instances in which applicants from other countries were denied the same service, including access to medical care and food banks.

While federal law provides for education for all children, regional authorities occasionally denied access to schools to children of temporary asylum and refugee applicants who lacked residential registration or who did not speak Russian. The Civic Assistance Committee reported that approximately one-third of the children of refugees were enrolled in schools. When parents encountered difficulties enrolling their children in school, authorities generally cooperated with UNHCR to resolve the problem.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. As of January 1, some 41,946 persons, 96 percent of whom were citizens of Ukraine, held a certificate of temporary asylum in Russia. A person who does not satisfy the criteria for refugee status, but who for humanitarian reasons could not be expelled or deported, may receive temporary asylum after submitting a separate application. There were reports, however, of authorities not upholding the principle of temporary protection.

g. Stateless Persons

According to the 2010 population census, the country was home to 178,000 self-declared stateless persons. Official statistics did not differentiate between stateless persons and other categories of persons seeking assistance. Law, policy, and procedures allow stateless persons and their children born in the country to gain nationality. The Civic Assistance Committee noted that most stateless persons in the country were elderly, ill, or single former Soviet Union passport holders who missed the opportunity to claim Russian citizenship after the Soviet Union broke up. The NGO reported various bureaucratic hurdles as obstacles to obtaining legal status in the country.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

While the law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, citizens could not fully do so because the government limited the ability of opposition parties to organize, register candidates for public office, access media outlets, and conduct political campaigns.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On July 1, the government conducted a national vote on a package of constitutional amendments. This vote was not legally a referendum and was considered by most experts to be extraconstitutional. As such it was not bound by Russia’s normal election laws, and domestic observers were not provided a role in monitoring the poll’s conduct. Authorities mobilized administrative resources to drive up voter participation, which in effect functioned as a de facto campaign in favor of the government’s proposed amendments, while those seeking to campaign publicly against the amendments were denied the opportunity. Because the vote was not legally a referendum, no international observers were present to monitor the process.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported that the 2018 presidential election “took place in an overly controlled environment, marked by continued pressure on critical voices” and that “restrictions on the fundamental freedoms, as well as on candidate registration, have limited the space for political engagement and resulted in a lack of genuine competition.” The OSCE also noted that “television, and in particular broadcasters that are state funded, owned, or supported, remains the dominant source of political information. A restrictive legislative and regulatory framework challenges freedom of media and induces self-censorship. Voters were thus not presented

with a critical assessment of the incumbent’s views and qualifications in most media.” Observers widely noted that the most serious potential challenger, Aleksey Navalny, was prevented from registering his candidacy due to a previous politically motivated criminal conviction.

In a statement on the 2016 State Duma elections, the OSCE’s election observation mission noted, “Democratic commitments continue to be challenged and the electoral environment was negatively affected by restrictions to fundamental freedoms and political rights, firmly controlled media and a tightening grip on civil society...Local authorities did not always treat the candidates equally, and instances of misuse of administrative resources were noted.”

The September 13 elections of 18 governors and 11 regional legislative bodies were marked by similar allegations of government interference and manipulation. Independent election monitors logged thousands of reported abuses during these elections at the regional and local levels. For example, in a case that was emblematic of many others, the election commission of the Arkhangelsk region announced on August 4 that environmental activist Oleg Mandrykin, nominated by the opposition Yabloko Party to run in the gubernatorial election, had failed to pass the municipal filter. The election commission claimed he had not collected the required number of signatures from the municipal districts and thus was disqualified from running for the post of governor. Mandrykin reported that his supporters had faced “unprecedented pressure” from regional authorities.

Authorities sought to restrict the work of independent election monitors and promoted government-sponsored monitoring instead. Observers were prohibited from being accredited to more than one polling station, limiting the ability of civil society to monitor elections. Critics contended that the law made it difficult for domestic election monitors to conduct surprise inspections due to provisions requiring observers to register with authorities, including the polling station they intended to monitor, three days before elections. Burdensome registration regulations also hampered the work of journalists wishing to monitor elections as well as independent or nonpartisan groups.

The election-monitoring NGO Golos announced that the September 13 election took place under the worst electoral regulations in 25 years, with greater limits on the electoral rights of citizens and increased attacks on the rights of election observers. For example, on September 9, in the Ivanovo and Novgorod regions, security officials searched the apartments of public observation organizers, including Ruslan Zinatullin, the head of the Tatarstan branch of the Yabloko Party. Authorities continued to hamper the efforts of Golos to take part in the election process, since its work was made more difficult by a law prohibiting NGOs listed as “foreign agents,” as well as by continuing harassment and intimidation by authorities.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The process for nominating candidates for office was highly regulated and placed significant burdens on opposition parties and their candidates. While parties represented in the State Duma may nominate a presidential candidate without having to collect and submit signatures, prospective self-nominated presidential candidates must collect 300,000 signatures, no more than 7,500 from each region, and submit the signatures to the Central Election Commission for certification. Presidential candidates nominated by parties without State Duma representation must collect 100,000 signatures. An independent presidential candidate is ineligible to run if the commission finds more than 5 percent of signatures invalid.

Candidates to the State Duma may be nominated directly by constituents, political parties in single-mandate districts, or political parties on their federal list, or they may be self-nominated. Political parties select candidates for the federal lists from their ranks during party conventions via closed voting procedures. Party conventions also select single mandate candidates. Only political parties that overcame the 5 percent threshold during the previous elections may form federal and single-mandate candidate lists without collecting signatures, while parties that did not must collect 200,000 signatures to register a candidate for the Duma. Self-nominated candidates generally must gather the signatures of 3 percent of the voters in their districts.

Gubernatorial candidates nominated by registered political parties are not required to collect signatures from members of the public, although self-nominated candidates are. The law also requires gubernatorial candidates not nominated by a registered party to meet a “municipal filter” requirement. Such candidates must obtain signatures of support from a defined portion of municipal deputies, the portion of which varies by region, as well as collect signatures from at least one deputy in each of a specified portion of municipal council districts.

Observers and would-be candidates reported the municipal filter was not applied equally and that authorities pressured municipal deputies not to provide signatures to candidates who were not preapproved by authorities. They asserted that no independent candidate with the potential to defeat authorities’ favored candidates was permitted to pass through the municipal filter, while progovernment candidates were passed through the filter without fulfilling technical requirements.

In some cases opposition parties were repeatedly denied registration or faced court-mandated suspensions of their activities. On January 14, the Supreme Court ruled to suspend for three months the work of opposition leader Dmitry Gudkov’s political party, Party of Change (officially known as Civic Initiative). The Justice Ministry filed a lawsuit against the party after refusing to register its charter because the party purportedly failed to provide the minutes from its meeting.

Authorities continued to engage in a pattern of harassment, including threats of violence, against Navalny and his supporters. On July 23, Dmitry Nizovtsev, the host of the YouTube channel for Navalny’s headquarters in Khabarovsk, was assaulted after he broadcast from a march organized to support ousted Khabarovsk Kray governor Sergey Furgal. He claimed that his attackers were linked to authorities and beat him because of his reporting and association with Navalny.

Systemic opposition parties (i.e., quasi-independent parties permitted by the government to appear on the ballot) also faced pressure. For example, media outlets reported on August 31 that representatives of the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party were attacked in Novosibirsk in the run-up to the September 13 regional election, including the headquarters of Roman Yakovlev, a candidate from the Communist Party. On July 26, the Communist Party also reported that its candidates had problems with passing the municipal filter in at least three regions.

State entities or entities closely aligned with the state also influenced their employees to vote a certain way. In Omsk workers from Russian Railways told journalists they were encouraged to photograph themselves with their completed ballots for the July 1 national vote on constitutional amendments. In Yekaterinburg the clergy of some Russian Orthodox Churches encouraged their parishioners to vote in favor of the constitutional amendments.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit participation of women and members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Women held less than 20 percent of elected seats in the national legislature. As of January women held approximately 5 percent of ministerial positions. While members of national minorities took an active part in political life, ethnic Russians, who constituted approximately 80 percent of the population, dominated the political and administrative system, particularly at the federal level.

Section 4. Official Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government acknowledged difficulty in enforcing the law effectively, and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year.

Corruption: Corruption was widespread throughout the executive branch, including within the security sector, as well as in the legislative and judicial branches at all levels. Its manifestations included bribery of officials, misuse of budgetary resources, theft of government property, kickbacks in the procurement process, extortion, and improper use of official position to secure personal profits. While there were prosecutions for bribery, a general lack of enforcement remained a problem. Official corruption continued to be rampant in numerous areas, including education, military conscription, health care, commerce, housing, social welfare, law enforcement, and the judicial system. Aleksey Kudrin, the head of the Accounts Chamber, told media in January that the level of corruption within the country had not decreased and amounted to trillions of rubles. Transparency International’s *Corruption Perception Index*, published in January, assessed corruption in the country as high.

On July 30, media outlets reported that investigators had opened a criminal case against Roman Koval, a member of the ruling United Russia party and a St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly deputy, for accepting large-scale bribes. Koval and his assistant were both detained on suspicion of receiving more than 15 million rubles (\$196,000) from an entrepreneur during a two-year period in exchange for allocating budgetary funds in a favorable manner.

There were reports of corruption by government officials at the highest level. Shortly after Mikhail Mishustin was appointed as prime minister in January, an investigation by Aleksey Navalny’s Anticorruption Foundation revealed that Mishustin had registered property worth three billion rubles (\$39.3 million) in the name of his relatives and associates. There were no indications of an investigation by authorities.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires government officials to file extensive declarations of all foreign real estate they or their immediate family members own and any large expenditure involving land, vehicles, and securities, as well as their incomes. The law was inconsistently and selectively enforced, and investigative bodies rarely acted upon media reports of undeclared assets held overseas and other alleged violations. According to Transparency International and investigative reporters, the information officials provided often did not reflect their true income or that of close family members.

Russian media reported in May that the Federal Service for State Registration hid data on a luxury apartment belonging to Igor Krasnov, who was appointed the country’s prosecutor general in January. According to reports, the service hid the names of the apartment’s owners in records from mid-April, although Krasnov and his underage daughter had been listed as the owners in records available in January. The apartment’s value was estimated at 58.8 million rubles (\$770,000).

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups operating in the country investigated and published their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were rarely cooperative or responsive to their concerns. Official harassment of independent NGOs continued and, in many instances, intensified, particularly of groups that focused on monitoring elections, engaging in environmental activism, exposing corruption, and addressing human rights abuses. NGO activities and international humanitarian assistance in the North Caucasus were severely

restricted, especially in Chechnya, which closed its borders in April, purportedly to limit the spread of COVID-19. Some officials, including High Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Moskalkova and her regional representatives, regularly interacted and cooperated with NGOs.

Authorities continued to use a variety of laws to harass, stigmatize, and in some cases halt the operation of domestic and foreign human rights NGOs (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association).

Officials often displayed hostility toward the activities of human rights organizations and suggested their work was unpatriotic and detrimental to national security. For example, Mikhail Degtyaryov, who was appointed interim governor of Khabarovsk Krai in July, warned against believing news reports about him, asserting that negative stories reveal “the hand of the West” and “it’s not for nothing that there are so many suspicious NGOs in Russia.”

Authorities continued to apply a number of indirect tactics to suppress or close domestic NGOs, including the application of various laws and harassment in the form of prosecution, investigations, fines, and raids (see sections 1.e. and 2.b.).

Authorities generally refused to cooperate with NGOs that were critical of government activities or listed as a foreign agent. International human rights NGOs had almost no presence east of the Ural Mountains or in the North Caucasus. A few local NGOs addressed human rights problems in these regions but often chose not to work on politically sensitive topics to avoid retaliation by local authorities. One NGO in this region reported that the organization’s employees sometimes had to resort to working in an individual capacity rather than as representatives of the organization.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: Authorities refused to cooperate with the OSCE Moscow Mechanism rapporteur investigating human rights abuses in Chechnya in 2018 and did not permit him to visit the country. Two years after the release of the rapporteur’s report, the government still had not provided the OSCE a substantive response to the report or taken action to address the report’s recommendations.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Some government institutions continued to promote human rights and intervened in selected abuse complaints, despite widespread doubt as to these institutions’ effectiveness.

Many observers did not consider the 168-member Civic Chamber, composed of government-appointed members from civil society organizations, to be an effective check on the government.

The Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights (HRC) is an advisory body to the president tasked with monitoring systemic problems in legislation and individual human rights cases, developing proposals to submit to the president and government, and monitoring their implementation. The president appoints some council members by decree, and not all members operated independently. In October 2019 President Putin overhauled the HRC, dismissing several well respected human rights defenders from the council and appointing Valeriy Fadeyev, a senior member of the ruling United Russia party, as its head. Experts noted that Fadeyev worked closely with government authorities and often echoed their assessment of well-known human rights cases. In a July 8 interview with *Kommersant*, Fadeyev stated he did not believe there were more than 300 political prisoners in the country and that organizations such as Memorial needed to be “more careful” with their lists.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Moskalkova was viewed as a figure with very limited autonomy. The country had regional ombudspersons in all regions with responsibilities similar to Moskalkova’s. Their effectiveness varied significantly, and local authorities often undermined their independence.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal, and the law provides the same punishment for a relative, including a spouse, who commits rape as for a nonrelative. The penalty for conviction of rape is three to six years’ imprisonment for a single offense, with additional time imposed for aggravating factors. According to NGOs, many law enforcement personnel and prosecutors did not consider spousal or acquaintance rape a priority and did not encourage reporting or prosecuting such cases. NGOs reported that local police officers sometimes refused to respond to rape or domestic violence calls unless the victim’s life was directly threatened. Authorities typically did not consider rape or attempted rape to be life threatening.

Domestic violence remained a major problem. There is no domestic violence provision in the law and no legal definition of domestic violence, making it difficult to know its actual prevalence in the country. The law considers beatings by “close relatives” an administrative rather than a criminal offense for first-time offenders, provided the beating does not cause serious harm requiring hospital treatment. The antidomestic violence NGO ANNA Center estimated that 60 to 70 percent of women suffering from some type of domestic violence do not seek help due to fear, public shame, lack of financial independence from their partners, or lack of confidence in law enforcement authorities. Laws that address bodily harm are general in nature and do not permit police to initiate a criminal investigation unless the victim files a complaint. The burden of collecting evidence in such cases typically falls on the alleged victims. The law prohibits threats, assault, battery, and killing, but most acts of domestic violence did not fall within the jurisdiction of the prosecutor’s office. The law does not provide for protection orders, which experts believe could help keep women safe from experiencing recurrent violence by their partners.

COVID-19-related stay-at-home orders and general restrictions on movement trapped many victims of domestic violence in the same space as the perpetrators. On May 5, media outlets reported that Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova acknowledged that NGOs recorded an increase of more than 50 percent in the number of domestic violence cases. The ANNA Center reported that 70 percent of the women that called its hotline stated the situation at home worsened during the COVID-19 lockdown. Many victims noted they could not leave their homes due to fear of being punished for violating the stay-at-home order.

There were reports that women defending themselves from domestic violence were charged with crimes. According to a *MediaZona* study, approximately 80 percent of women sentenced for murder between 2016 and 2018 killed a domestic abuser in self-defense. In one case in 2018, three teenaged sisters allegedly killed their father, Mikhail Khachatryan, in their Moscow home. In October 2019 authorities confirmed that the father had physically and sexually abused the girls for many years without any repercussions. On July 12, the Attorney General’s Office upheld the murder charges, a reversal to Deputy Prosecutor General Viktor Grin’s December 2019 recommendation to reclassify the sisters’ actions as self-defense. As of September the women remained under house arrest as they awaited a jury trial. The case ignited widespread support for the sisters across the country, with many persons calling for their release.

According to the ANNA Center, when domestic violence offenses were charged, articles under the country’s criminal law were usually applied that employed the process of private prosecution. The process of private prosecution requires the victim to gather all necessary evidence and bear all costs after the injured party or his or her guardian took the initiative to file a complaint with a magistrate judge. The NGO noted that this process severely disadvantages survivors. Experts estimated that seven of 10 such cases were dropped due to reconciliation of the parties as a result of the abuser pressuring, manipulating, and intimidating the victim who often had to continue living in the same house.

According to NGOs, police were often unwilling to register complaints of domestic violence, often saying that cases were “family matters,” frequently discouraged victims from submitting complaints, and often pressed victims to reconcile with abusers. On March 15, in response to domestic violence cases presented to the ECHR, the deputy minister of justice and the Russian representative at the ECHR, Mikhail Galperin, asserted that the state should not be held responsible for the law enforcement officials’ inaction in domestic violence cases if the perpetrator was a private person.

The majority of domestic violence cases filed with authorities were either dismissed on technical grounds or transferred to a reconciliation process conducted by a justice of the peace whose focus was on preserving the family rather than punishing the perpetrator. NGOs estimated that 3 percent of such cases eventually reached the courts. Victims of domestic violence in the North Caucasus experienced particular difficulty seeking protection from authorities. On June 26, Human Rights Watch reported that Madina Umayeva died and was buried overnight in the Chechen Republic. Umayeva’s mother, suspecting her son-in-law of beating her daughter to death and burying her to hide the evidence, had the body exhumed for autopsy. Three days after the body was exhumed, Chechnya head Ramzan Kadyrov publicly accused the mother of spreading gossip about her daughter’s death and dismissed the possibility that it constituted murder. Umayeva’s mother later appeared on television and said, “I apologize for having listened to rumors. I apologize to [you].”

NGOs noted there were government-operated institutions that provided services to affected women such as social apartments, hospitals wards, and shelters. Access to these services was often complicated, since they required proof of residency in that particular municipality, as well as proof of low-income status. In many cases these documents were controlled by the abusers and not available to victims. A strict two-month stay limit in the shelters and limited business hours of these services further restricted victims’ access to social services. After COVID-19-related restrictions forced many shelters to close temporarily, NGOs rented out apartments and hotels to shelter the victims.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law does not specifically prohibit FGM/C. NGOs in Dagestan reported that FGM/C was occasionally practiced in some villages. On May 19, media outlets reported a nine-year-old girl from Ingushetia underwent an FGM procedure at a hospital in Magas in June 2019. The girl’s mother claimed that her former husband and his new wife took the girl to the hospital for the procedure without the mother’s consent. Authorities opened a criminal investigation into the hospital and the doctor who performed the operation. The clinic allegedly advertised FGM procedures performed by a pediatric gynecologist.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Human rights groups reported that “honor killings” of women persisted in Chechnya, Dagestan, and elsewhere in the North Caucasus, but they were rarely reported or acknowledged. Local police, doctors, and lawyers often collaborated with the families involved to cover up the crimes. For example, Russian media reported that in February in Ingushetia, Magomedbashir Mogushkov stabbed and killed his sister, Liza Yevloyeva, to “wash away the shame from the family.” On the eve of the killing, Mogushkov saw his sister on a police surveillance video when a well-known criminal, Isa Altemirov, was being detained. Altemirov’s gang was known to seduce Ingush women into extramarital relationships and blackmail them for money.

In some parts of the North Caucasus, women continued to face bride kidnapping, polygamy, forced marriage (including child marriage), legal discrimination, virginity requirements before marriage, and forced adherence to Islamic dress codes. Women in the North Caucasus often lost custody of their children after the father’s death or a divorce, due to traditional law that prohibits women from living in a house without a man. For example, on August 6, Russian media reported that Liana Sosurkayeva from Chechnya lost her two children to her husband’s brother after the husband died. She has been denied custody of the children, on the basis of Chechen traditional law.

Sexual Harassment: The law contains a general provision against compelling a person to perform actions of a sexual character by means of blackmail, threats, or by taking advantage of the victim’s economic or other dependence on the perpetrator. There is no legal definition of harassment, however, and no comprehensive guidelines on how it should be addressed. Sexual harassment was reportedly widespread, but courts often rejected victims’ claims due to lack of sufficient evidence. In January the newspaper *Vedomosti* published a survey showing that 16 percent of women and 7 percent of men had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace at least once in their careers. The newspaper noted that the law does little to help victims, as there is no concept of “harassment” in the labor code.

On April 29, media outlets reported that two women had accused Aleksey Venediktov, the head of the Ekho Moskv radio station, of sexual harassment. According to Anna Veduta, Venediktov made unwanted advances toward her after a company dinner in 2012 and tried to kiss her outside her home. An activist who asked not be named recounted a similar experience in 2017. Although he had told media in 2005 that sexual harassment was a “right” at Ekho Moskv, Venediktov denied these allegations.

Coercion in Population Control: There were reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. In October media widely reported allegations of forced sterilizations of 15 women between 2006 and 2016 at the Uktus Boarding House in Yekaterinburg, which houses orphans with health issues, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Former residents of the institution also alleged that some women were forced to have abortions. One former resident of the institution reportedly died after undergoing sterilization surgery. Regional law enforcement and health authorities in the Sverdlovsk region launched a probe into the reports, and regional human rights ombudsperson Tatyana Merzlyakova called the alleged sterilizations “unacceptable.”

Discrimination: The constitution and law provide that men and women enjoy the same legal status and rights, but women often encountered significant restrictions. Women have experienced discrimination in the workplace, in pay, and access to credit (see section 7.d.). There are 100 jobs that the Ministry of Labor has ruled to be especially physically taxing, including firefighting, mining, and steam boiler repair, that remain off limits to women.

Children

Birth Registration: By law citizenship derives from parents at birth or from birth within the country’s territory if the parents are unknown or if the child may not claim the parents’ citizenship. Failure to register a birth resulted in the denial of public services.

Education: Education is free and compulsory through grade 11, although regional authorities frequently denied school access to the children of persons who were not registered local residents, including Roma, asylum seekers, and migrant workers.

Child Abuse: The country does not have a law on child abuse, but the law outlaws murder, battery, and rape. The penalties for conviction of such crimes range from five to 15 years in prison and, if they result in the death of a minor, up to 20 years in prison. A 2017 law that makes beatings by “close relatives” an administrative rather than a criminal offense for first-time offenders, provided the beating does not cause serious harm requiring hospital treatment, applies to children as well. Some Duma deputies claimed that children need discipline and authority in the family, condoning beating as a mode of discipline.

Studies indicated that violence against children was fairly common. According to a report published in April 2019 by the National Institute for Child Protection, one in four parents admitted to having beaten their children at least once with a belt. In an extreme case of child abuse, on September 11, media outlets reported that Gulmira Bukenova in Omsk region continuously beat, tied, and starved an 18-month-old boy who lived with her. The mother, Yevgeniya Kabelskaya, was forced to work for free in the household while they lived with Bukenova’s family.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 for both men and women. Local authorities may authorize marriage from age 16 under certain circumstances. More than a dozen regions allow marriage from age 14 under special circumstances, such as pregnancy or the birth of a child.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The age of consent is 16. The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation, sale, offering, or procuring of children for prostitution, and practices related to child pornography. Authorities generally enforced the law. For example, on May 8, media outlets reported that authorities detained monk Kliment (Korablev) in Orenburg region for “committing a number of sexual crimes against three minors.” Authorities held him in a pretrial detention center for more than four months. The Orthodox Church prohibited Korablev from taking part in church services until the investigation was over.

The law prohibits the manufacture, distribution, and possession with intent to distribute child pornography, but possession without intent to distribute is not prohibited by law. Manufacture and distribution of pornography involving children younger than 18 is punishable by two to eight years in prison or three to 10 years in prison if children younger than 14 are involved. Authorities considered child pornography to be a serious problem.

Roskomnadzor has the power to shut down any website immediately and without due process until its owners prove its content does not include child pornography. Roskomnadzor reported that from 2012 to 2017, it shut down 38,000 links related to child pornography, or 14 percent of all blocked links.

Institutionalized Children: There were reports of neglect as well as physical, sexual, and psychological abuse in state institutions for children. Children with disabilities were especially vulnerable. NGOs pointed to the closing of schools and strict stay-at-home orders during the height of COVID-19 measures as especially detrimental to at-risk children, including children in institutions. NGOs noted that many had limited access to social services and teachers or counselors.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

The 2010 census estimated the Jewish population at slightly more than 150,000. The president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia has stated that the actual Jewish population is nearly one million.

Media outlets reported several cases of anti-Semitism during the year. For example, on April 13, unidentified perpetrators set fire to a synagogue and Jewish cultural center in Arkhangelsk. No one was injured, but a Jewish community leader estimated property damages at 1.5 million rubles (\$19,800). Two months after the incident, police detained a 32-year-old suspect. Authorities initiated a criminal case based on intentional damage to property rather than anti-Semitism.

Leading experts from the Jewish community had varying assessments of the level of anti-Semitism in the country. While the chief rabbi of Russia stated in January that the level of anti-Semitism was at its lowest point historically, in June the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities argued that the level of latent anti-Semitism was still quite high. Some political and religious figures made anti-Semitic remarks publicly. On July 20, the Verkhnepyshminskiy City Court fined Father Sergey Romanov, a former hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, for making anti-Semitic remarks during one of his sermons.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides protection for persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, including access to education, employment, health services, information, communications, buildings, transportation, the judicial system, and other state services. The government often did not enforce these provisions effectively.

The conditions of guardianship imposed by courts on persons with disabilities deprived them of almost all personal rights. Activists reported that courts declared tens of thousands of individuals “legally incompetent” due to intellectual disabilities, forcing them to go through guardians to exercise their legal rights, even when they could make decisions for themselves. Courts rarely restored legal capacity to individuals with disabilities. By law individuals with intellectual disabilities were at times prevented from marrying without a guardian’s consent.

In many cases persons with intellectual or physical disabilities were confined to institutions, where they were often subjected to abuse and neglect. Roszdravnadzor, the Federal Service for Surveillance in Health Care, announced that it found abuses in 87.4 percent of institutions for children and adults with intellectual disabilities during a 2019 audit. On November 3, Russian media reported that it was not uncommon for persons with intellectual disabilities who had recently turned 18 to die within a few months of transferring from a children’s institution to an adult neuropsychiatric boarding house due to harsh conditions. The report noted that residents were sometimes given haloperidol and other suppressive substances, sent to isolation wards, tied to beds, and prohibited from going outside freely. On May 6, media outlets reported that a Bogotolsk neuropsychiatric hospital’s junior nurse physically abused an elderly person with a disability by grabbing him and dragging him on the floor without his pants on.

Federal law requires that buildings be accessible to persons with disabilities. While there were improvements, especially in large cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, authorities did not effectively enforce the law in many areas of public transportation and in buildings. Many individuals in wheelchairs reported they continued to have trouble accessing public transportation and had to rely on private cars. Wheelchair-accessible street curbs are not widely available in many regions throughout the country.

Election law does not specifically mandate that polling places be accessible to persons with disabilities, and the majority of them were not. Election officials generally brought mobile ballot boxes to the homes of voters with disabilities.

The government began to implement inclusive education, but many children with disabilities continued not to study in mainstream schools due to a lack of accommodations to facilitate their individual learning needs. Many schools did not have the physical infrastructure or adequately trained staff to meet the needs of children with disabilities, leaving them no choice but to stay at home or attend specialized schools. Even when children were allowed to attend a mainstream school, many staff and children lacked understanding to meet the educational needs of the child. For example, on September 2, media outlets reported that a child with a disability at a Krasnoyarsk school was excluded from a class photograph, adding that persons with disabilities were often kept from public view.

While the law mandates inclusive education for children with disabilities, authorities generally segregated them from mainstream society through a system that institutionalized them through adulthood. Graduates of such institutions often lacked the social, educational, and vocational skills to function in society.

There appeared to be no clear standardized formal legal mechanism by which individuals could contest their assignment to a facility for persons with disabilities. The classification of children with intellectual disabilities by category of disability often followed them through their lives. The official designations “imbecile” and “idiot,” assigned by a commission that assesses children with developmental delays at age three, signified that authorities considered a child uneducable. These designations were almost always irrevocable. The designation “weak” (having a slight cognitive or intellectual disability) followed an individual on official documents, creating barriers to employment and housing after graduation from state institutions.

Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups

The law prohibits discrimination based on nationality, but according to a 2017 report by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, officials discriminated against minorities, including through “de facto racial profiling, targeting in particular migrants and persons from Central Asia and the Caucasus.” Activists reported that police officers often stopped individuals who looked foreign and asked them for their documents, claiming that they contained mistakes even when they were in order, and demanded bribes.

Hate crimes targeting ethnic minorities continued to be a problem, although the NGO SOVA Center for Information and Analysis reported that the number of such crimes declined thanks to authorities’ effectively targeting groups that promoted racist violence. As of August 3, one individual had died and 14 had been injured in racially motivated attacks since the beginning of the year. On June 13, Timur Gavrilov, a 17-year-old medical student from Azerbaijan, died after being stabbed 20 times in Volgograd. Police later detained Vitaliy Vasilyev, an unemployed local man, who confessed to attacking Gavrilov on the basis of his ethnic identity. According to media reports, Vasilyev had ties to radical right-wing organizations and attacked the student because he wanted to “kill a non-Russian.” Authorities charged Vasilyev with murder.

According to a 2018 report by the human rights group Antidiscrimination Center Memorial (ADC Memorial), Roma faced widespread discrimination in access to resources (including water, gas, and electrical services); demolitions of houses and forced evictions, including of children, often in winter; violation of the right to education (segregation of Romani children in low-quality schools); deprivation of parental rights; and other forms of structural discrimination.

On February 21, a court in Leninsk-Kuznetskiy fined a local resident for posts on social media judged to be an “incitement to hatred or enmity” directed against Roma. The man made the posts during large-scale brawls that took place in villages near Leninsk-Kuznetskiy between Romani and non-Romani residents.

Indigenous People

The constitution and various statutes provide support for members of “small-numbered” indigenous groups of the North, Siberia, and the Far East, permitting them to create self-governing bodies and allowing them to seek compensation if economic development threatens their lands. The government granted the status of “indigenous” and its associated benefits only to those ethnic groups numbering fewer than 50,000 and maintaining their traditional way of life. A 2017 report by ADC Memorial noted the major challenges facing indigenous persons included “seizure of territories where these minorities traditionally live and maintain their households by mining and oil and gas companies; removal of self-government bodies of indigenous peoples; and repression of activists and employees of social organizations, including the fabrication of criminal cases.”

On August 9, indigenous residents of Norilsk commemorated the International Day of Indigenous Peoples by holding a march under the theme, “Industrial companies are seizing primordial lands.” A dozen individuals from the Nenets, Nganasans, Dolgans, and Entsy groups who participated in the march alleged they were oppressed, not allowed to lead a traditional way of life, and that their ability to fish was hampered. They specifically condemned industrial oil and gas giant Norilsk Nickel for destroying their way of life. Police initially tried to stop the march but eventually relented.

Indigenous sources reported state-sponsored harassment, including interrogations by security services as well as employment discrimination (see section 7.d.). Such treatment was especially acute in areas where corporations wanted to exploit natural resources. By law indigenous groups have exclusive rights to their indigenous lands, but the land itself and its natural resources belong to the state. Companies are required to pay compensation to local inhabitants, but activists asserted that local authorities rarely enforced this provision. Activists stated that interests of corporations and indigenous persons were in constant conflict.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law criminalizes the distribution of “propaganda” of “nontraditional sexual relations” to minors and effectively limits the rights of free expression and assembly for citizens who wish to advocate publicly for LGBTI rights or express the opinion that homosexuality is normal. Examples of what the government considered LGBTI propaganda included materials that “directly or indirectly approve of persons who are in nontraditional sexual relationships” (see section 2.a.). The law does not prohibit discrimination against LGBTI persons in housing, employment, or access to government services, such as health care.

During the year there were reports state actors committed violence against LGBTI individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, particularly in Chechnya (see section 1.a.). According to the Russian LGBT Network, as of July more than 175 LGBTI persons had fled Chechnya since 2017, the majority of whom had also left the country.

There were reports that government agents attacked, harassed, and threatened LGBTI activists. For example, on January 29, media outlets reported that Rostov-on-Don-based LGBTI activist Anna Dvornichenko fled Russia for the Netherlands after local law enforcement authorities threatened to initiate criminal and administrative cases against her for “extremist” activities and distribution of LGBTI propaganda to minors. She told media that police refused to investigate several attacks against her in which unknown assailants attacked her with pepper spray and a smoke bomb. In addition, on November 13 in St. Petersburg, masked men shouted homophobic slogans as police and Rospotrebnadzor employees disrupted the opening night of Side By Side, Russia’s only annual LGBT film festival.

LGBTI persons were particular targets of societal violence, and police often failed to respond adequately to such incidents. For example, the Russian LGBT Network reported that a transgender man was attacked while he was leaving a supermarket in the Kursk region on April 28. The assailant grabbed the man by the neck, beat him, and threatened to kill him. After seeking medical attention, the man was diagnosed with a ruptured eardrum and a concussion. According to the network, the victim filed a report, but police did not investigate the incident and refused to open a criminal case.

There were reports that authorities failed to respond when credible threats of violence were made against LGBTI persons. For example, LGBTI and feminist activist Yuliya Tsvetkova reported she had received numerous death threats, including from an organization known as “Saw” that called for violence against the LGBTI community. Tsvetkova was under investigation for the distribution of pornography and LGBTI propaganda to minors and was under house arrest when she received numerous threats that included her address and other personal details. Tsvetkova also stated that her mother had received numerous threatening telephone calls related to her case. When Tsvetkova informed police, they dismissed the reported incidents and claimed it would be impossible to investigate them.

On April 14, the Russian LGBT Network released a report that showed 11.6 percent of LGBTI respondents in their survey had experienced physical violence, 4 percent had experienced sexual violence, and 56.2 percent had experienced psychological abuse during their lifetime. The report noted that LGBTI persons faced discrimination in their place of study or work, when receiving medical services, and when searching for housing. The report also noted that transgender persons were uniquely vulnerable to discrimination and violence. The Russian LGBT Network claimed that law enforcement authorities did not always protect the rights of LGBTI individuals and were sometimes the source of violence themselves. As a result LGBTI individuals had extremely low levels of trust in courts and police.

In one example of low levels of trust in authorities, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that in September St. Petersburg police arrested 53-year-old actor and theater producer Yuriy Yanovskiy for killing Jamshid Hatamjonov, a transgender sex worker from Uzbekistan who preferred to be called Tamara. Tamara was reported missing in January, and her dismembered body was found in July. The investigation was complicated because the victim’s acquaintances were not willing to testify due to fear authorities would identify and harass them for their sexual orientation and profession. Activists suspected that the victim did not seek any help from authorities for her client’s prior violent behaviors because she feared police.

There were reports police conducted involuntary physical exams of transgender or intersex persons. LGBTI NGO Coming Out reported that in March 2019, some police officers physically and sexually harassed a transgender woman in the process of medical transition. Police had detained her to investigate the death of her roommate. During interrogation at the police station, the victim reported that a police officer hit her approximately five times on the head, using both his open hand and his fist. The police officers also inquired repeatedly about her genitals, demanded that she display her chest, made rude comments about the shape and size of her genitals, took photographs of her, and shared the images on social media.

The Association of Russian Speaking Intersex reported that medical specialists often pressured intersex persons (or their parents if they were underage) into having so-called normalization surgery without providing accurate information about the procedure or what being intersex means.

The law prohibiting the “propaganda of nontraditional sexual orientations” restricted freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly for LGBTI persons and their supporters (see sections 2.a. and 2.b.). LGBTI persons reported significant societal stigma and discrimination, which some attributed to official promotion of intolerance and homophobia.

High levels of employment discrimination against LGBTI persons reportedly persisted (see section 7.d.). Activists asserted that the majority of LGBTI persons hid their sexual orientation or gender identity due to fear of losing their jobs or homes, as well as the risk of violence. LGBTI students also reported discrimination at schools and universities.

Medical practitioners reportedly continued to limit or deny LGBTI persons health services due to intolerance and prejudice. The Russian LGBT Network’s report indicated that, upon disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity, LGBTI individuals often encountered strong negative reactions and the presumption they were mentally ill.

Transgender persons faced difficulty updating their names and gender markers on government documents to reflect their gender identity because the government had not established standard procedures, and many civil registry offices denied their requests. When documents failed to reflect their gender identity, transgender persons often faced harassment by law enforcement officers and discrimination in accessing health care, education, housing, transportation, and employment.

There were reports LGBTI persons also faced discrimination in the area of parental rights. The Russian LGBT Network reported LGBTI parents often feared that the country’s prohibition on the “propaganda of nontraditional sexual orientation” to minors would be used to remove custody of their children.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Persons with HIV or AIDS faced significant legal discrimination, growing informal stigma-based barriers, and employment discrimination (see section 7.d.). They also continued to face barriers to adopting children in many cases.

According to NGO activists, men who have sex with men were unlikely to seek antiretroviral treatment, since treatment exposed the fact that these individuals had the virus, while sex workers were afraid to appear in the official system due to threats from law enforcement bodies. Many individuals who injected drugs also did not seek treatment because of the country’s aggressive criminalization of illegal drugs and the marginalization of users. Economic migrants also concealed their HIV status and avoided treatment due to fear of deportation. By law foreign citizens who are HIV-positive may be deported. The law, however, bars the deportation of HIV-positive foreigners who have a Russian national or permanent resident spouse, child, or parents. Younger women with HIV or AIDS in particular faced multiple challenges and barriers to accessing treatment because of stigma, discrimination, gender stereotypes, violence, and difficulty accessing sexual and reproductive health care.

Some prisoners with HIV or AIDS experienced abuse and denial of medical treatment and had fewer opportunities for visits with their children (see section 1.c.). For example, on January 24, media outlets reported that Giorgi Murusidze was denied HIV medication for several months while in a St. Petersburg detention center.

On September 7, the head of the Federal Scientific and Methodological Center for the Prevention and Control of AIDS had been diverted to address the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing the capacity of the center to provide patients antiretroviral therapy. An NGO noted that it was difficult for persons with HIV or AIDS to receive elective health care, as most beds for patients with infectious diseases had been diverted to COVID-19-related cases. Migrants with HIV or AIDS had an especially difficult time because many lost their jobs and had difficulty accessing health care.

Children with HIV faced discrimination in education. NGOs noted that many younger children with HIV faced resistance by other parents when trying to enroll in schools.

On July 11, the government lifted restrictions on persons with HIV who wanted to adopt children if the adoptive parents met strict criteria, such as being on dispensary observation for at least a year and having a CD4 cell level above 350 cells/milliliter.

The Ministry of Justice continued to designate HIV-related NGOs as foreign agents, effectively reducing the number of organizations that could serve the community (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association).

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

The lack of an internal passport often prevented homeless citizens from fully securing their legal rights and social services. Homeless persons faced barriers to obtaining legal documentation as well as medical insurance, without which clinics refused to treat them. Media outlets reported that in April police fined several homeless persons for violating the self-isolation regime imposed in various cities to control the spread of COVID-19.

Promotion of Acts of Discrimination

A homophobic campaign continued in state-controlled media in which officials, journalists, and others derided LGBTI persons as “perverts,” “sodomites,” and “abnormal,” and conflated homosexuality with pedophilia.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides that workers may form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination, but it does not require employers to reinstate workers fired due to their union activity. The law prohibits reprisals against striking workers. Unions must register with the Federal Registration Service, often a cumbersome process that includes lengthy delays and convoluted bureaucracy. The grounds on which trade union registration may be denied are not defined and can be arbitrary or unjustified. Active duty members of the military, civil servants, customs workers, judges, prosecutors, and persons working under civil contracts are excluded from the right to organize. The law requires labor unions to be independent of government bodies, employers, political parties, and NGOs.

The law places several restrictions on the right to bargain collectively. For example, only one collective bargaining agreement is permitted per enterprise, and only a union or group of unions representing at least one-half the workforce may bargain collectively. The law allows workers to elect representatives if there is no union. The law does not specify who has authority to bargain collectively when there is no trade union in an enterprise.

The law prohibits strikes in the military and emergency response services. It also prohibits strikes in essential public-service sectors, including utilities and transportation, and strikes that would threaten the country’s defense, safety, and the life and health of its workers. The law additionally prohibits some nonessential public servants from striking and imposes compulsory arbitration for railroad, postal, and municipal workers, as well as public servants in roles other than law enforcement.

Laws regulating workers’ strikes remained extremely restrictive, making it difficult to declare a strike but easy for authorities to rule a strike illegal and punish workers. It was also very difficult for those without a labor contract to go on a legal strike. For example, on July 13, according to media reports, several dozen Renaissance Heavy Industries workers staged a strike at the Gazprom plant in the Amur region demanding several months of unpaid wages. A crowd there was dispersed by riot police, and authorities charged several participants with criminal charges of hooliganism and participation in riots.

Union members must follow extensive legal requirements and engage in consultations with employers before acquiring the right to strike. Solidarity strikes and strikes on matters related to state policies are illegal, as are strikes that do not respect the onerous time limits, procedures, and requirements mandated by law. Employers may hire workers to replace strikers. Workers must give prior notice of the following aspects of a proposed strike: a list of the differences of opinion between employer and workers that triggered the strike; the date and time at which the strike is intended to start, its duration, and the number of anticipated participants; the name of the body that is leading the strike and the representatives authorized to participate in the conciliation procedures; and proposals for the minimum service to be provided during the strike. In the event a declared strike is ruled illegal and takes place, courts may confiscate union property to cover employers’ losses.

The Federal Labor and Employment Service (RosTrud) regulates employer compliance with labor law and is responsible for “controlling and supervising compliance with labor laws and other legal acts which deal with labor norms” by employers. Several state agencies, including the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecutor’s Office, RosTrud, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, are responsible for enforcing the law. These agencies, however, frequently failed to enforce the law, and violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining provisions were common. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those under other similar laws related to civil rights.

Employers frequently engaged in reprisals against workers for independent union activity, including threatening to assign them to night shifts, denying benefits, and blacklisting or firing them. Although unions were occasionally successful in court, in most cases managers who engaged in antiunion activities did not face penalties. For example, in June the independent university teachers’ union University Solidarity called on the heads of the Yugra State University to stop discrimination against Vanda Tilles, a professor and union member at that university. Tilles claimed that the lack of transparency in the promotion system at the university promoted the firing of active union leaders.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits most forms of forced or compulsory labor but allows for it as a penal sentence, in some cases as prison labor contracted to private enterprises.

The government was not effective in enforcing laws against forced labor, and there was a government policy or pattern of forced labor. Prescribed penalties for violations were commensurate with those for other serious crimes. Instances of labor trafficking have been reported in the construction, manufacturing, logging, textile, and maritime industries, as well as in saw mills, agriculture, sheep farms, grocery and retail stores, restaurants, waste sorting, street sweeping, domestic service, and forced begging (see section 7.c.). Serious gaps remained in protecting migrant laborers, particularly from North Korea, who generally earned 40 percent less than the average salary. Migrant workers at times experienced exploitative labor conditions characteristic of trafficking cases, such as withholding of identity documents, nonpayment for services rendered, physical abuse, unsafe working conditions, and extremely poor living conditions.

Under a state-to-state agreement in effect since 2009, North Korean citizens worked in the country in a variety of sectors, including the logging and construction industries in the Far East. In order to comply with the 2017 UN Security Council Resolution prohibiting the employment of North Koreans, Russia has largely eliminated North Korean laborers working in the country legally and continues to affirm its commitment to do so. The country failed, however, to return all North Korean workers by the December 2019 UN deadline and claimed that North Korea’s closing of its borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the effort. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was believed to have manipulated its publicly available data on the number of North Koreans working in the country. Observers believed a significant number of North Koreans entering the country on student, tourist, and “other” visa categories since the introduction of UN sanctions came to work rather than their stated purpose of travel, especially in the Far East.

Authorities failed to screen departing North Korean workers for human trafficking and indications of forced labor.

There were reports of forced labor in the production of bricks, raising livestock, and at sawmills, primarily in Dagestan. While both men and women were exploited for forced labor in these industries in the Northern Caucasus region, victims were primarily male job seekers recruited in Moscow.

Also see the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children younger than 16 in most cases and regulates the working conditions of children younger than 18. The law permits children to work at 14 under certain conditions and with the approval of a parent or guardian. Such work must not threaten the child’s health or welfare. The law lists occupations restricted for children younger than 18, including work in unhealthy or dangerous conditions, underground work, or jobs that might endanger a child’s health and moral development.

RosTrud is responsible for inspecting enterprises and organizations to identify violations of labor and occupational health standards for minors. The government effectively enforced the law, although penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for other serious crimes.

Child labor was uncommon but could occur in the informal service and retail sectors. Some children, both Russian and foreign, were subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, forced participation in the production of pornography, and forced begging (see section 6, Children).

Also, see the Department of Labor’s *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, HIV status, gender identity, or disability. Although the country placed a general ban on discrimination, the government did not effectively enforce the law and penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for other similar laws related to civil rights.

Discrimination based on gender in compensation, professional training, hiring, and dismissal was common. Employers often preferred to hire men to save on maternity and child-care costs and to avoid the perceived unreliability associated with women with small children. Such discrimination was often very difficult to prove.

The law prohibits employer discrimination in posting job vacancy information. It also prohibits employers from requesting workers with specific gender, race, nationality, address registration, age, and other factors unrelated to personal skills and competencies. Notwithstanding the law, vacancy announcements sometimes specified gender and age requirements, and some also specified a desired physical appearance.

According to the Center for Social and Labor Rights, courts often ruled in favor of employees filing complaints, but the sums awarded were often seen as not worth the cost and time required to take legal action.

The law restricts women’s employment in jobs with “harmful or dangerous conditions or work underground, except in nonphysical jobs or sanitary and consumer services,” and forbids women’s employment in “manual handling of bulk weights that exceed the limits set for their handling.”

The law includes numerous tasks prohibited for women and includes restrictions on women’s employment in mining, manufacturing, and construction. During the year women were prohibited from employment in 456 labor categories. In late 2019 the law was amended to reduce the number of labor categories prohibited to women to 98, starting in 2021. According to the Ministry of Labor, women on average earned 27.9 percent less than men in 2019. The legal age requirements for women and men to access either their full or partial pension benefits are not equal.

The law does not prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace, and there are no criminal or civil remedies for sexual harassment experienced in the workplace.

The law requires applicants to undergo a mandatory pre-employment health screening for some jobs listed in the labor code or when enrolling at educational institutions. The medical commission may restrict or prohibit access to jobs and secondary or higher education if it finds signs of physical or mental problems. The law prohibits discrimination of persons with disabilities, but they were often subjected to employment discrimination. Companies with 35 to 100 employees have an employment quota of 1 to 3 percent for persons with disabilities, while those with more than 100 employees have a 2 to 4 percent quota. An NGO noted that some companies kept persons with disabilities on the payroll in order to fulfill the quotas but did not actually provide employment for them. Inadequate workplace access for persons with disabilities also limited their work opportunities.

Many migrants regularly faced discrimination and hazardous or exploitative working conditions. Despite President Putin signing a decree in April to extend the validity of documents necessary for temporary residency and labor within the country in response to COVID-19 restrictions, media outlets reported numerous cases of migrants being threatened with deportation or forced to pay to extend their status. For example, on May 14, media outlets reported that the employer of a Uzbek citizen who had been working legally in the country for 15 years forced him to pay for the extension of his work permit during the two months he was on unpaid leave and threatened to call authorities if he refused.

Employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was a problem, especially in the public sector and education. Employers fired LGBTI persons for their sexual orientation, gender identity, or public activism in support of LGBTI rights. Primary and secondary school teachers were often the targets of such pressure due to the law on “propaganda of nontraditional sexual orientation” targeted at minors (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

Persons with HIV or AIDS were prohibited from working in areas of medical research and medicine that dealt with bodily fluids, including surgery and blood drives. The Ministry of Internal Affairs does not hire persons with HIV or AIDS, although a person who contracts HIV or AIDS while employed is protected from losing their job.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The monthly minimum wage increased to the official poverty level on January 1. Some local governments enacted minimum wage rates higher than the national rate.

Nonpayment of wages is a criminal offense and is punishable by fines, compulsory labor, or imprisonment. Federal law provides for administrative fines of employers who fail to pay salaries and sets progressive compensation scales for workers affected by wage arrears. The government did not effectively enforce the law, and nonpayment or late payment of wages remained widespread. According to the Federal State Statistics Service, Rosstat, as of October 1, wage arrears amounted to approximately 1.83 billion rubles (\$23.8 million).

The law provides for standard workhours, overtime, and annual leave. The standard workweek may not exceed 40 hours. Employers may not request overtime work from pregnant women, workers younger than age 18, and other categories of employees specified by federal law. Standard annual paid leave is 28 calendar days. Employees who perform work involving harmful or dangerous labor conditions and employees in the Far North regions receive additional annual paid leave. Organizations have discretion to grant additional leave to employees.

The law stipulates that payment for overtime must be at least 150 percent for the first two hours and not less than 200 percent after that. At an employee’s request, overtime may be compensated by additional holiday leave. Overtime work may not exceed four hours in a two-day period or 120 hours in a year for each employee. The government did effectively enforce minimum wage and hour laws, and penalties for violations were commensurate with those for other similar crimes.

The law establishes minimum conditions for workplace safety and worker health, but it does not explicitly allow workers to remove themselves from hazardous workplaces without threat to their employment. The law entitles foreigners working in the country to the same rights and protections as citizens.

Occupational safety and health standards were appropriate within the main industries. Government inspectors are responsible for enforcement and generally applied the law in the formal sector. Serious breaches of occupational safety and health provisions are criminal offenses and penalties for violations were commensurate with those of other similar crimes. Experts generally pointed to prevention of these offenses, rather than adequacy of available punishment, as the main challenge to protection of worker rights. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce the law in all sectors. RosTrud, the agency that enforces the provisions, noted state labor inspectors needed additional professional training and that the agency needed additional inspectors to enforce consistent compliance. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

At the end of 2019, an estimated 13 million persons were employed in the shadow economy. Employment in the informal sector was concentrated in the southern regions. The largest share of laborers in the informal economy was concentrated in the trade, construction, and agricultural sectors, where workers were more vulnerable to exploitative working conditions. Labor migrants worked in low-skilled jobs in construction but also in housing, utilities, agriculture, and retail trade sectors, often informally. Labor law and protections apply to workers in the informal sector.

No national-level information was available on the number of workplace accidents or fatalities during the year. According to Rosstat, in 2019 approximately 23,300 workers were injured in industrial accidents, including 1,060 deaths.

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