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Russia 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

Russia continued its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and its armed forces committed numerous war crimes and other atrocities and abuses, leading the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova in relation to the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Authorities used new laws to punish dissent and independent expression in Russia, according to human rights defenders. Authorities jailed antiwar protesters and political opposition figures, prosecuted numerous individuals for online expression, forced closure of nongovernmental organizations, further restricted media outlets, pressured political parties, and continued transnational repression against critics of the Kremlin abroad. Authorities escalated persecution of political opposition figures, sentencing Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years in prison following conviction of charges including treason and the already imprisoned Aleksey Navalny to an additional 19 years for alleged "extremism."

There were credible reports of summary execution, torture, rape, and attacks killing and injuring civilians and damaging or destroying civilian infrastructure by Russia's forces in Ukraine, as well as war crimes, including those involving forced deportation or transfer of civilians, and the forced

placement in foster care or adoption of Ukrainian children. The government operated an extensive system of filtration and detention operations that sometimes included the use of forced labor. Russia's occupation and purported annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and four oblasts in Eastern Ukraine affected significantly and negatively the human rights situation there, with credible reports of politically motivated arrests, detentions, and trials of Ukrainian citizens in Russia, many of whom claimed to have been tortured (see also *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine).

Outside of human rights abuses committed by Russia in relation to its invasion of Ukraine, significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; pervasive torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers in armed conflict; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, or enforcement of threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious

restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a state and on the right to leave the country; refoulement of refugees; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence and sexual violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of ethnic and religious minority groups; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities; and the worst forms of child labor.

The government did not take adequate steps to identify and punish most officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

There were credible reports personnel of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group committed widespread human rights abuses and atrocities in Ukraine and countries in the Middle East and Africa in which they operated. Authorities

did not investigate or prosecute such actions.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed, or attempted to commit, arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

Russian Federation representatives continued to reject requests to open an investigation into the circumstances of the 2020 poisoning of prominent opposition politician and anti-corruption campaigner Aleksey Navalny by officers of the Federal Security Service. Officials continued to deny Navalny was poisoned by a nerve agent. On June 3, the European Court of Human Rights ruled Russia violated Navalny's rights by refusing to open a criminal investigation into the poisoning.

There was no investigative progress on numerous high-profile killings, including the 2014 death of Timur Kuashev, a journalist critical of the country's invasion of Crimea; the 2015 death of Ruslan Magomedragimov, an activist advocating for the Lezgin ethnic minority group; the 2015 death of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov; nor on the 2015 and 2017 poisonings of opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza and the 2020 poisoning of

Aleksey Navalny. On April 7, investigators informed the Supreme Court of Chechnya they stopped the investigation into the 2020 kidnapping and torture of Salman Tepsurkayev, a young Chechen activist and critic of Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov. In 2022, a lawyer for a prominent human rights group claimed security forces killed Tepsurkayev in 2020.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and independent media outlets continued to publish reports that local authorities in the Republic of Chechnya continued a campaign of violence against individuals perceived to be members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or other sexual minority (LGBTQI+) community.

According to human rights organizations, authorities failed to open investigations into the allegations or reports of extrajudicial killings and mass torture of LGBTQI+ persons in Chechnya and denied there were any such persons in the republic.

There were multiple reports that in some prison colonies and other places of detention, authorities systematically tortured inmates, in some cases resulting in death or suicide. For example, on June 14, activist Anatoly Berezikov died in the special detention center in Rostov-on-Don of apparent suicide. In May, Berezikov was arrested on misdemeanor criminal charges for distributing antiwar leaflets. His lawyer alleged police threatened and tortured Berezikov. The Investigative Committee opened a criminal investigation into Berezikov's death.

There were reports the government or its proxies committed, or attempted to commit, extrajudicial killings of its opponents in other countries, including numerous such cases in Ukraine. On August 31, a German court sentenced a Russian national identified only as “Valid D.” to 10 years in prison for conviction of a “willingness to commit murder and preparing a serious act of violence endangering the state.” Prosecutors asserted a member of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov’s security apparatus commissioned Valid D. to organize the killing. Media reported the target was Mokhmad Abdurakhmanov, brother of exiled Chechen dissident Tumso Abdurakhmanov. There was no investigative progress by the government on prominent extrajudicial killings in other European countries in prior years, including the 2019 killing in Berlin of former Chechen rebel commander Zelimkhan Khangoshvili.

b. Disappearance

There were reports of enforced 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 1,721 outstanding cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances in the country.

There were reports police committed enforced disappearances and

abductions. For example, on January 7, security forces abducted 25 persons from the village of Alkhan-Kala in Chechnya. On April 24, human rights NGO Memorial reported the individuals were being held in a detention center in Grozny on charges of participating in an illegal armed formation. Family members alleged some of those detained were tortured.

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

There were reports of abductions and torture in the North Caucasus, including of political activists, LGBTQI+ persons, and others critical of Chechnya head Kadyrov. For example, in January, independent news outlet *Novaya Gazeta Europe* reported Elina Ukhmanova was tortured in a rehabilitation center in Dagestan where her parents sent her for “treatment” for bisexuality and atheism. Ukhmanova said she ran away from home twice to escape domestic violence, but Dagestan police forcibly returned her to her home. There were widespread reports Russia’s armed forces, Russia-led forces, and Russian occupation authorities in Ukraine engaged in numerous enforced disappearances (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

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

There were reports of deaths because of torture.

Physical abuse of suspects by police officers reportedly was 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 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, where there were widespread reports police and security forces tortured or abused alleged militants and civilians in detention facilities. For example, in January, authorities in the Republic of Kalmykia arrested five employees from Corrections Colony Number 2 for allegedly torturing prisoners Magomed Atimagomedov and Daud Kuramagomedov. There were reports police beat or otherwise abused persons, in some cases resulting in their death.

According to human rights groups, police and security forces used excessive force and harsh tactics when detaining antiwar and antimobilization

protesters.

There were reports 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 10, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Alice Edwards told media Aleksey Navalny's placement in isolation on 11 separate occasions, amounting to 114 days in solitary confinement in harsh conditions during a seven-month period, appeared disproportionate and if confirmed, would amount to a form of torture.

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 could request that suspects be placed in psychiatric clinics on an involuntary basis. For example, in February, an Ussuriisk District Court extended the forced hospitalization of Siberian shaman Aleksandr Gabyshev, who was sent to a psychiatric clinic against his will in 2021 after being detained for anti-Putin activism in 2019.

Reports of nonlethal physical abuse and hazing continued in the armed forces. Activists reported such hazing was often tied to extortion schemes.

There were reports Russian forces, Russia-led forces, Russian proxies, and Russian occupation authorities in Ukraine engaged in torture, including rape

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

Impunity was a significant problem in the security forces. In most cases where law enforcement officers or other government officials were publicly implicated in human rights abuses, authorities denied internal and external requests for independent investigation and engaged in disinformation campaigns or other efforts to obfuscate such allegations. The few cases that were brought to trial resulted in sentencing inconsistent with the severity of the charged crime. In one case, in May, five police officers in Tatarstan were convicted for the torture of a prisoner who later committed suicide. The maximum sentence was seven years in prison, but three officers were given time served. The government's propensity to ignore serious human rights allegations along with the uneven application of the rule of law and a lack of judicial transparency resulted in impunity for most perpetrators.

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.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Prison overcrowding was a serious problem. 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 was a problem; NGOs reported approximately 50 percent of prisoners with HIV did not receive adequate treatment. While the law mandated 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.

Physical and sexual abuse by prison guards was systemic, according to human rights NGOs. Human Rights Watch recorded numerous instances of abuse and torture of antiwar activists throughout the year. Prisoner-on-prisoner violence was also a problem. There were widespread reports authorities and the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group recruited inmates from prisons to fight in Ukraine.

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. Former political prisoners described having to carry out meaningless tasks multiple times a day and being sent to the “punishment brigade” for minor infractions, conditions that one prisoner described as psychologically harrowing. According to human rights organizations, political prisoners were held incommunicado for lengthy periods and authorities often refused

to provide information regarding their location. For example, on February 18, Human Rights Watch reported authorities refused to provide information regarding the location of opposition politician Andrey Pivovarov to his lawyer and family for more than one month. On February 20, Pivovarov's lawyer was able to ascertain Pivovarov was transferred from a St. Petersburg facility to a penal colony in Karelia and placed in incommunicado detention. Prison authorities reportedly refused Pivovarov's request to call his family or lawyer.

Administration: Authorities rarely conducted investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment. While prisoners could 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. Officials allegedly

transferred some high-profile prisoners to penal colonies far from major cities where access and visitation was significantly more difficult.

There were reports of authorities prosecuting journalists and activists for reporting torture in prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

By law authorities could arrest and hold a suspect for up to 48 hours without court approval, provided there was evidence of a crime or a witness; otherwise, an arrest warrant was required. The law required 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 were required to prepare a protocol stating the grounds for the arrest, and both the detainee and police officer had to sign it within three hours of detention. Police had to

interrogate detainees within the first 24 hours of detention. Prior to interrogation, a detainee had the right to meet with an attorney for two hours. No later than 12 hours after detention, police were required to notify the prosecutor. They were also required to give the detainee an opportunity to notify their relatives by telephone unless a prosecutor issued a warrant to keep the detention secret. Police were required to release a detainee after 48 hours, subject to bail conditions, unless a court decided, 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 expired. The defendant and their attorney were required to be present at the court hearing, either in person or through a video link. The law prohibited lawyers from bringing “communications technologies on the grounds of a correctional institution,” effectively barring lawyers from bringing cell phones or other recording devices into detention facilities when meeting with their clients.

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 were required to complete their investigation and transfer a case to a prosecutor for arraignment within two months of a suspect’s

arrest, although an investigative authority could extend a criminal investigation for up to 12 months. Extensions beyond 12 months needed the approval of the head federal investigative authority in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service (FSB), or the Investigative Committee and the approval of the court. According to defense lawyers, the two-month time limit often was exceeded, especially in cases with a high degree of public interest.

Detainees had trouble obtaining adequate defense counsel. While the law provided defendants the right to choose their own lawyers, 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 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 incommunicado detention could reportedly last for weeks in some cases.

There were reports authorities' use of facial recognition technology to identify and detain demonstrators resulted in the arrest of the wrong individuals. There were also reports authorities targeted lawyers representing political prisoners.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were numerous reports of arbitrary arrest or detention, often in connection with demonstrations or single-person pickets, such as those organized against the country's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For example, on June 7, police detained five individuals associated with human rights NGO Viasna for planning demonstrations against mobilization. Numerous other examples of arbitrary arrests included those of individuals for wearing blue and yellow colors, holding blank posters, or signs that simply read "Peace."

There were reports Russian forces, Russia-led forces, and Russian occupation authorities in Ukraine engaged in widespread 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 could not normally exceed two months, but the court had the power to extend it to six months, as well as to 12 or 18 months if the crime

of which the defendant was accused was especially serious. Detained opposition figures, journalists, and civil society activists often faced long periods of pretrial detention. By law, a detainee could challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court. Due to problems with judicial independence, however, judges typically agreed with the investigator and dismissed defendants' complaints.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provided 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 2022, courts acquitted 0.33 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 the Agora International Human Rights Group, it was 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.

Trial Procedures

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

The defendant had a legal presumption of innocence and the right to a fair, timely, and public trial, but these rights were not always respected. The law provided for the appointment of an attorney free of charge if a defendant could not 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 that many defense attorneys did not vigorously defend their clients and that there were few qualified defense attorneys in remote areas of the country. Defense attorneys could visit their clients in detention, although defense lawyers claimed authorities electronically monitored their conversations and did not always provide them access to their clients.

The constitution affords the right to a public trial, but a May analysis by independent news outlet *Mediazona* showed the number of closed-door criminal cases almost doubled between 2018 and 2022. The law provided only a few categories of cases that judges could order closed to the public, including cases involving state secrets, cases against defendants younger than 16, and cases of sexual offenses. Judges could also close proceedings

to ensure the safety of the trial participants, a provision human rights advocates stated was often used in high-profile political cases. For example, on April 26, a judge of the Basmanny District Court of Moscow cited this provision when ordering the courtroom cleared during a hearing in Aleksey Navalny's extremism trial. Navalny opposed the closure, arguing the move was an attempt to illegally restrict his access to the case materials and "to make sure no one knows about [the case]."

Non-Russian defendants had the right to free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals, although the quality of interpretation was typically poor. During trial the defense was not required to present evidence and was given an opportunity to cross-examine witnesses and call defense witnesses, although judges could deny the defense this opportunity.

The law provided for trial by jury in criminal cases if the defendant was charged with murder, kidnapping, narcotics smuggling, and certain other serious crimes. Nonetheless, trials by jury remained rare, and most verdicts and sentences were rendered by judges.

Authorities particularly infringed on the right to a fair trial in Chechnya, where observers noted 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 for which they were convicted. For example, on April 28, the Pervorechensky District Court in Vladivostok sentenced Dmitry Barmakin, a Jehovah's Witness, to eight years in prison following conviction on extremism charges. The court previously acquitted Barmakin on charges of extremism in 2021, but an appeals court overturned the acquittal and ordered a new trial. There were other reports of Jehovah's Witnesses receiving long prison sentences on extremism charges.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were 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. The government generally did not permit access to political prisoners by human rights or humanitarian organizations.

As of December 19, the human rights organization Memorial listed 628 political prisoners in the country, including 422 individuals who were allegedly tried and imprisoned wrongfully for exercising freedom of religion or belief. Memorial, which operated from abroad after the organization's legal entities were shut down by the government in April 2022, had in the

past estimated the actual number of political prisoners in the country could be three to four times greater than the number on its list. According to Memorial, the total number of political prisoners increased almost tenfold between 2015 and 2022. Memorial's list included opposition activists and politicians, journalists, and human rights activists imprisoned for their work, including Vladimir Kara-Murza, Aleksey Navalny, Ilya Yashin, and Andrey Pivovarov, journalists such as members of the student publication *DOXA*, *RusNews* reporter Maria Ponomarenko, and *Chernovik* editor Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, and human rights activists such as Yuriy Dmitriyev; many Russians and Ukrainians (including Crimean Tatars) imprisoned for their vocal opposition to the country's war against Ukraine, including Aleksey Gorinov and Aleksandra Skochilenko; individuals imprisoned for participating in protests during the year; members of the military and security services who refused to participate in the war in Ukraine; and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, certain Muslim groups, and other minority religious groups.

On April 17, a Moscow court sentenced prominent prodemocracy opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years in prison. In April 2022, Kara-Murza was detained and charged with "deliberately spreading false information" regarding the armed forces for a March 2022 speech to the Arizona House of Representatives in which he denounced the country's war against Ukraine. He was convicted of this charge and also convicted of treason and acting on behalf of an organization the government designated

“undesirable,” the Free Russia Foundation. According to human rights activists, it was the longest sentence imposed for a political activity since the Soviet period. On July 31, an appeals court upheld the sentence.

In April, prosecutors opened a new criminal case against Navalny for organizing an extremist organization. On August 4, a Moscow court convicted Aleksey Navalny on terrorism and extremism charges and sentenced the imprisoned opposition leader to 19 years in a maximum-security prison. The closed trial took place in a high-security penal colony in the Vladimir Region, where Navalny was serving nine years for conviction of fraud and contempt of court. He was previously sentenced in 2021 to 2.5 years in prison for an alleged parole violation. Prosecutors also charged several associates of Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation who resided outside the country, including Leonid Volkov, Ivan Zhdanov, Lyubov Sobol, and Georgy Alburov, in the extremism case.

On April 19, a Moscow court upheld the December 2022 decision to sentence prominent former Moscow municipal lawmaker Ilya Yashin to 8.5 years in prison for conviction of deliberately spreading false information regarding the military. Yashin had been previously convicted on misdemeanor charges of “discrediting” the military on his YouTube channel. Amnesty International and other international NGOs assessed Yashin was punished for his criticism of the war in Ukraine.

On August 4, an appeals court upheld the four-year sentence against

opposition politician Andrey Pivovarov for carrying out the activities of an “undesirable organization.” Pivovarov was also banned from public and political activities for eight years. Human rights NGO Memorial considered Pivovarov a political prisoner.

f. Transnational Repression

The government engaged in acts of transnational repression to intimidate or exact reprisal against individuals outside of its sovereign borders, including against political opponents, civil society activists, and human rights defenders. According to Freedom House, the government continued to conduct highly aggressive transnational repression activities abroad. Its efforts, which heavily relied on killing as a tool, targeted former insiders and others perceived as threats to the regime’s security.

Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, Forced Returns, or Other Violence or Threats of Violence: The country was credibly alleged to have killed or kidnapped persons, or used violence or threats of violence against individuals in other countries, including to force their return to the country, for the purpose of politically motivated reprisal.

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: There were reports the government attempted to exert pressure and exact reprisal against individuals located outside the country through threats against individuals, family, friends, or associates. For example, on July 5, a court in Chechnya

sentenced Zarema Musayeva, mother of exiled human rights lawyer and activist Abubakar Yangulbayev, to five and one-half years in prison for conviction of fraud and assaulting authorities. Yangulbayev alleged Chechen authorities forcibly sent four of his relatives to serve in the Russian armed forces in Ukraine. In another example, in June, exiled opposition politician and Navalny associate Ivan Zhdanov told media his father Yuriy Zhdanov was being harassed in prison. In 2022, Yuriy Zhdanov was sentenced to three years in prison following conviction of fraud and forgery. Memorial recognized Zhdanov as a political prisoner.

Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools: There were credible reports authorities attempted to misuse international law enforcement tools for politically motivated reprisal against specific individuals located outside the country. For example, in June, Artur Zaripov told media Polish authorities detained him four times during the past 18 months on an Interpol notice from Russia. In each instance, he was released once authorities concluded the charges were baseless. Zaripov, a political activist advocating for the independence of Russia's Republic of Bashkortostan, fled Russia in 2018 after being detained for 18 months on terrorism charges.

Efforts to Control Mobility: There were reports the government attempted to control mobility to exact reprisal against citizens abroad by revoking their identity documents, denying them consular services, or otherwise engaging in actions aimed at jeopardizing their legal status or restricting their

movement. In January, the Russian embassy in Ottawa reportedly denied consular services to a Russian national resident in Canada due to her membership in a pro-Navalny Facebook group.

Bilateral Pressure: There were credible reports the government for politically motivated purposes attempted to exert bilateral pressure on another country to take adverse action against specific individuals.

According to media reports, exiled antiwar dissidents feared the government was pressuring other countries to force them to return. For example, in July, Serbian authorities denied the extension of temporary residence status for Russian nationals Vladimir Volokhonsky and Peter Nikitin, cofounders of the Russian Democratic Society in Serbia.

Volokhonsky alleged the decision could be the result of pressure by Russian security services. In March, border guards in Georgia refused entry to Russian human rights defender Daryana Gryaznova, who had resided in Tbilisi since 2021, for unspecified reasons. Media reported numerous other Russian activists and journalists were prevented from entering Georgia during the year. Human rights activists expressed concern that a June agreement on the exchange of personal data among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russian government authorities would facilitate the targeting for repression and possible politically motivated extradition of Russian dissidents living in exile. Human rights defenders reported several Russian activists were forcibly deported to Russia from Kyrgyzstan, in some cases without due process.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

There were reports authorities seized the property of religious groups and NGOs without due process or adequate restitution. For example, in January, the government evicted the Sakharov Center from three properties on the basis of its foreign agent designation. The country endorsed the 2009 Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues but declined to endorse the 2010 Guidelines and Best Practices. No legislation or special mechanism in the country addressed the restitution of or compensation for private property; the same was true for heirless property. The government had laws in place providing for the restitution of cultural property, but according to the laws' provisions, claims could be made only by states and not individuals.

More information regarding property restitution and compensation can be found in the Department of State's 2020 *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act* report to Congress, available on the Department's website at <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

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

The law forbade officials from entering a private residence except in cases

prescribed by federal law or when authorized by a judicial decision. The law also prohibited the collection, storage, utilization, and dissemination of information concerning a person's private life without their consent. The law required telecommunications providers to store all electronic and telecommunication data. Politicians from minority parties, NGOs, human rights activists, and journalists alleged 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 permitted authorities with a warrant to monitor telephone calls in real time, but this safeguard was largely pro forma. The Ministry of Information and Communication required telecommunications service providers to allow the FSB to tap telephones and monitor the internet. The law allowed security services to obtain data on the location of mobile telephones without a court order for a period of 24 hours, or 48 hours in the case of missing children.

Law enforcement officers reportedly accessed, collected, or used private communications or personal data arbitrarily or unlawfully or without appropriate legal authority.

The law required explicit consent for governmental and private collection of

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

Authorities punished family members for offenses allegedly committed by their relatives. For example, on March 1, police arrested Aleksey Moskalyov in Yefromov, Tula Region, on charges of “discrediting” the army after Moskalyov’s daughter, age 12, was reported to authorities for painting antiwar slogans in art class. Moskalyov’s daughter was put in child protective custody after being interviewed by FSB officers at school. A local court convicted Moskalyov and sentenced him to two years in prison on March 28. Memorial recognized Moskalyov as a political prisoner.

According to the information and analytical agency TelecomDaily, the country had more than 13 million closed-circuit television cameras in 2020, with approximately one-third of these installed by the government and the rest by businesses and individuals to protect private property. By the end of 2020, approximately 200,000 government surveillance cameras were 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, to scan crowds against a database of wanted individuals. During

demonstrations in 2021, authorities used facial recognition data to identify protesters, sometimes incorrectly, days after the demonstration.

The government maintained 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 authorities threatened to remove children from the custody of parents engaged in political activism or some forms of religious worship, or parents who identified as LGBTQI+. Several families reportedly left the country due to fear of arrest.

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

i. Conflict-related Abuses

Russia continued its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in which human rights organizations attributed extensive war crimes, thousands of civilian deaths, widespread displacement of persons, and other abuses to Russia's forces and Russia-led proxies. This included the forced deportation of civilians from Ukraine to Russia, often following a harsh and abusive "filtration"

process, and numerous reports of forced deportations and adoptions of children from Ukraine. According to Amnesty International and other international NGOs, Russia's forces and Russia-led proxies carried out thousands of extrajudicial killings of civilians in Ukraine. Russia's forces also debilitated critical civilian infrastructure, including energy infrastructure, in repeated strikes across Ukraine. Humanitarian access to vulnerable populations in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine was severely restricted or impossible. On March 17, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova for their alleged responsibility for "the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation." According to the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, Russian forces and occupation authorities forcibly relocated these children using four methods: separated children from their parents during so-called filtration operations; took custody of children whose parents were killed or who lost contact with their parents during hostilities; pressured or coerced parents to send their children to summer camps in Russia or Crimea for their "safety" and then refused to return them; and seized custody of and relocated institutionalized children. In 2022, President Putin signed a decree making it easier for Russian citizens to adopt and give citizenship to children from Ukraine who allegedly did not have parental care. Media reported the

new rules made it harder for Ukrainian relatives and the government of Ukraine to secure custody of these children. Between February 2022 and July, the government reported it received approximately 4.8 million residents of Ukraine, more than 700,000 of whom were children. A February study by the Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab assessed the Russian federal government systematically relocated at least 6,000 children to a network of re-education and adoption facilities in Russia-occupied Crimea and Russia.

Significant human rights issues in the occupied areas included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; enforced disappearances; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by Russia's forces or Russia-led proxies; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and transfer of prisoners to Russia; unjust detention; serious problems with the independence of the occupation's "judiciary"; political prisoners or detainees; unjust interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including attacks on civilian infrastructure and cities, resulting in widespread civilian death, enforced disappearances or abductions, forcible transfers of civilian populations, torture, physical abuses, and conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjust arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful

assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; severe restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement; inability of citizens to freely change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; forced participation in sham “elections” organized by Russia in violation of international law; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious acts of corruption; serious restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including rape; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups or Indigenous persons, including Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and prohibiting independent trade unions or significant or systematic restrictions on workers’ freedom of association. (For further information regarding Russia’s human rights abuses and violations in the context of its war against and occupation of portions of Ukraine, see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Ukraine.)

Since 2015, Russia’s armed forces 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, civilians, and humanitarian

workers (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Syria).

Since 2017, Russia provided the Central African Republic Army unarmed military advisors under the auspices of parameters established by the UN Security Council sanctions regime. According to Human Rights Watch, Russian armed forces and Russian proxies committed grave abuses against civilians with complete impunity, including summarily executing, torturing, and beating civilians (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the Central African Republic).

In prior years, members of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group were deployed to other countries in the Middle East and Africa, including to Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mali, where they were also linked to reported human rights abuses, including summary executions, torture, and other cruel and degrading treatment.

Child Soldiers: The Secretary of State determined Russia had governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces and government-supported armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers during the reporting period of April 2022 to March. See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

While the constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for the press and other media, the government increasingly restricted this right. Federal, 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 Russia's war against Ukraine; political prisoners; treatment of LGBTQI+ persons; problems involving the environment, elections, and corruption; and 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 were widespread, particularly regarding points of view critical of the government or its policies.

Freedom of Expression: The government enacted further restrictions on freedom of expression to stifle criticism of Russia's war against Ukraine, human rights organizations reported. On March 22, President Putin approved amendments to 2022 laws that criminalized "spreading false information" regarding Russia's war in Ukraine and "discrediting the military." These amendments expanded the law to cover "volunteer formations, organizations, or individuals" that helped the Russian armed forces as well as increased the maximum penalties for those who repeatedly violated the law. Authorities used these laws widely and indiscriminately to severely suppress freedom of expression, including by members of the press. As of December 19, independent rights group OVD-Info reported authorities initiated 844 criminal cases for antiwar expression, including charges of spreading "false information" and "discrediting the military."

Authorities misused the country's expansive definition of extremism, under which citizens could 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. The law prohibited the dissemination of false "socially significant information" online, in mass media, or during protests or public events, as well as 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.”

The law criminalized “offending the religious feelings of believers” (blasphemy). Conviction of actions in public “demonstrating clear disrespect for society and committed with the intent to insult the religious feelings of believers” were subject to fines, compulsory labor for up to one year, or imprisonment for up to one year. If these acts were committed in places of worship, the punishment was a fine, compulsory labor for up to three years, or a prison sentence of up to three years.

The law prohibited showing “disrespect” online for the state, authorities, the public, flag, or constitution.

The government continued to enact new restrictions on the content that could be shared on the internet. The law authorized Roskomnadzor, the country’s media oversight agency, to block websites that “violate the rights of [Russian citizens],” including by restricting the “dissemination of socially significant information.” Experts characterized the law as restricting “Russophobic” content and targeted specifically at YouTube. The law prohibited journalists and websites from publishing the personal data of law enforcement officers and certain other state employees affiliated with the country’s security services. Expanding the definition of sensitive data, the FSB published in 2021 a list of topics that could be “used against the security” of Russia, including information and assessments of the country’s

military, security sector, and space agency, Roscosmos. Individuals who collected information in the specified categories could be subject to designation as “foreign agents.”

During the year authorities invoked laws prohibiting “inciting minors to participate in dangerous activities” or “violations to the established procedure for organizing or holding a public event” to charge individuals who published material online related to demonstrations.

During the year authorities invoked a law prohibiting the distribution of “propaganda on nontraditional sexual relations” to children to punish the exercise of free speech by LGBTQI+ persons and their supporters. The law was amended in 2022, significantly expanding the scope of the prohibition on such speech.

The law banned 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, although the law prohibited displaying images of individuals found guilty of committing crimes in accordance with the verdict of the Nuremberg Tribunal. During the year, authorities enforced a law prohibiting the “propaganda of narcotics” to prosecute or threaten to block independent outlets and journalists.

During the year authorities used a law banning cooperation with “undesirable foreign organizations” to restrict free expression. For example,

in January, the independent Russian news outlet *Meduza* was added to the list of “undesirable organizations.”.

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.

Virtually all independent or opposition-leaning media outlets were blocked within the country or shut down, along with many independent NGOs. The Kremlin intensified efforts to block access to information that contradicted official narratives. Immediately following the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the government cracked down on independent media in the country, closing flagship liberal radio station Ekho Moskvyy and independent daily newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*.

The education law subjected any educational activity, including informal training sessions, YouTube lectures, and peer-to-peer tutoring, to government regulation and oversight. The law also granted the government authority to approve or disapprove all elements of international educational cooperation. The law’s goal was to protect schoolchildren from “anti-Russian propaganda submitted under the guise of educational activities.” Prominent academics warned the law would stifle intellectual freedom and creativity. There were reports the government sanctioned academic personnel for their teachings, writing, research, or political views.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists continued to be subjected to arrest, imprisonment, physical attack, harassment, and intimidation for their reporting. 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 government officials and police attacking journalists; police detaining journalists to interfere with or punish them for their reporting; police framing journalists for serious crimes to interfere with or punish them for their reporting; and police raids on the offices of independent media outlets that observers believed were designed to punish or pressure the outlets.

For example, journalist Yelena Milashina and lawyer Aleksandr Nemov were severely assaulted on their way to observe the sentencing of a human rights activist in Grozny, Chechnya, in July. In another example, journalist Roman Ivanov was arrested in April on charges of spreading false information regarding the army. In court, Ivanov denied the charges and accused authorities of continuously pressuring him regarding his work since 2020. Foreign journalists working in the country also faced intimidation and harassment tactics from authorities, including verbal threats, revocation of visas, withdrawal of accreditation, and arrest on spurious charges.

There was no progress during the year in establishing accountability in several 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 for Members of the Press and Other

Media, Including Online Media: The government directly and indirectly censored media, much of which occurred online.

There were reports the government retaliated against those who produced or published deemed unfavorable to the government, especially regarding its war in Ukraine. For example, on June 7, Roskomnadzor blocked all websites run by the independent human rights and media project OVD-Info. Authorities provided no reason for the move, according to OVD-Info. The International Press Institute reported at least 187 additional websites were blocked in the country in 2022 for publishing news on the war in Ukraine.

Self-censorship in independent media was also reportedly widespread.

The vast majority of the country's mass media was funded by the government or progovernment actors. Government-friendly oligarchs owned most other outlets, which were permitted to determine what they published within formal or informal boundaries set by the government. In the regions, each governor 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.

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 for the creation and production of content. At many government-owned or controlled outlets, the state increasingly dictated editorial policy. While the law restricted foreign ownership of media outlets to no more than 20 percent, another provision of the ambiguously worded law apparently banned 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.

The law required the Ministry of Justice to maintain a list of media outlets designated as “foreign agents.” The decision to designate media outlets or individual journalists as foreign agents could be made outside of court by other government bodies, including law enforcement agencies. The law allowed authorities to label individuals (both Russian and foreign citizens) as “foreign agents” if they disseminated foreign media to an unspecified number of persons, receive funding from abroad, or, after a 2020 amendment, “carry out the interests of a foreign state.” The amendment specified that a foreign journalist “performing the functions of a foreign

agent, incompatible with his professional activities as a journalist” could be declared an individual foreign agent.

Human rights defenders expressed concern the “foreign agent” law was being used to restrict further the activities of or selectively punish journalists, bloggers, and social media users. Individuals labeled a “foreign agent” were required to register with the Ministry of Justice, and those living abroad also had to create and register a domestic legal entity to publish materials inside the country. All information published by the “foreign agent” individual was required to be marked as having been produced by a “foreign agent.” Failure to comply with the law could result in heavy fines.

As of August 10, there were 188 outlets and 137 individuals designated as “media foreign agents,” the majority of whom were journalists.

The government imposed onerous labeling requirements for media outlets designated as foreign agents, and the law established fines for the dissemination of information or media content regarding or belonging to a “foreign agent” without specifying this “foreign agent” status. During the year, authorities vigorously enforced labeling requirements and further intensified their campaign against “media foreign agents” in the context of a broader crackdown on independent media.

The law allowed authorities to close any organization a court determined to

be extremist, including media outlets and websites. Roskomnadzor 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. The law required Roskomnadzor to block, without a court decision, websites deemed to justify extremism or terrorism, if the prosecutor general or his deputy submitted a request.

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 were criminal offenses. The law prescribed criminal penalties of up to two years' imprisonment for conviction of slander or libel "using information and telecommunications networks, including the internet." Authorities used these laws to target human rights defenders and civil society activists in criminal investigations, including by accusing them of spreading "fake news" concerning the war in Ukraine or libelously criticizing public officials.

National Security: Authorities cited laws against treason, terrorism, and protecting national security to arrest or punish critics of the government or deter criticism of government policies or officials, such as opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza. There were reports critics of the government's counterterrorism policies were themselves charged with "justifying terrorism." On May 2, President Putin signed into law amendments to the criminal code that increased penalties for conviction of

treason, terrorism, and sabotage to up to life in prison.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet and censored online content and monitored all internet communications.

According to Freedom House's report *Freedom on the Net 2023*, internet freedom in the country continued to rapidly decline as authorities implemented restrictive laws to control the information space and sought to eliminate criticism of the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine.

The law required internet providers to install equipment to route web traffic through servers in the country. The government employed its longstanding use of the System for Operative Investigative Activities, which required internet service providers (ISPs) to install, at their own expense, a device that routed all customer traffic to an FSB terminal. The system enabled police to track private email communications, identify internet users, and monitor their internet activity. Internet freedom advocates asserted the measure allowed for surveillance by intelligence agencies and enabled state authorities to control information and block content.

The law allowed authorities to impose significant fines for internet providers and social media companies that became repeat violators of the "sovereign internet" law by failing to install and operate state-controlled software on their systems. The "sovereign internet" law also prescribed the creation of

an independent domain name system for the country, separate from the global system, which would allow the country to isolate itself from the global internet, further restricting the free flow of information. Media reported the government conducted a test of this system on July 4-5, which prevented internet users from accessing common Western websites including Google and Wikipedia but also disconnected some state-run websites such as Russian Railways.

The law required domestic and foreign businesses to store citizens' personal data on servers physically located in the country. Companies refusing to do so could be fined, with heavier fines or being blocked from operating in the country for repeat offenses. In March, amendments to the law came into force barring banks and state-owned companies from using Western foreign messenger services such as Microsoft Teams, Skype, and WhatsApp to transfer personal or financial data. On September 30, Microsoft stopped renewing software licenses in Russia.

Telecommunications companies were required to temporarily retain user data and make it available to law enforcement agencies. Observers believed the country's security services were able to intercept and decode encrypted messages on at least some messaging platforms. The law also required telecommunications companies to provide authorities with "backdoors" around encryption technologies; companies faced fines for noncompliance.

The law required foreign tech companies with a daily audience larger than

500,000 users in the country to open official representative offices in the country by the end of the year. Local representation afforded authorities leverage to enforce fines and regulations, including content restrictions, through pressure on domestically located employees. If tech companies did not comply, Roskomnadzor was authorized to block their access to Russian users' personal data.

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 the agency deemed offensive or illegal, including information that was already prohibited, such as items on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The law gave the prosecutor general and Roskomnadzor authority to demand ISPs block websites that promoted extremist information and "mass public events that are conducted in violation of appropriate procedures." The law required social media companies to independently block and remove "obscene language" and other prohibited content.

There was a growing trend of authorities seeking to pressure social media platforms to censor posts and remove content deemed objectionable. This was especially the case with posts and content related to Russia's war against Ukraine. According to the internet freedom NGO Roskomsvoboda, more than 10,000 websites had been blocked for allegedly distributing materials "discrediting the Russian armed forces". Roskomsvoboda

reported government agencies permanently blocked more than 1.47 million websites, citing statistics from the Prosecutor General's Office.

The law required 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 could demand that content deemed in violation be removed and imposed increasingly heavy fines for noncompliance.

Roskomnadzor also sought to pressure social media companies into unblocking certain progovernment sites or individuals.

A law on the "right to be forgotten" allowed individuals in the country to request that search engine companies block search results that contained information regarding them. According to Freedom House's 2021 *Freedom on the Net* report, the law was "routinely applied to require search engines to delete links to websites that contain personal information regarding an individual if it is no longer considered relevant." The law failed to limit the "right to be forgotten" when the information requested for removal was in the public interest or concerned public figures impeding freedom of expression.

There was a growing trend of social media users being prosecuted for the political, religious, or other ideological content of posts, shares, and "likes," especially content related to Ukraine, which resulted in fines or prison

sentences if convicted.

The government prohibited online anonymity. The law required commercial virtual private network (VPN) services and internet anonymizers to block access to websites and internet content prohibited in the country. The law also authorized law enforcement agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB, to identify VPN services that did not comply with the ban. By law, Roskomnadzor could also block sites that provided instructions on how to circumvent government blocking. Civil society watchdogs reported blockages of VPN servers, and media reported authorities sought to block certain kinds of VPN traffic during the year.

The law prohibited companies registered as “organizers of information dissemination,” including online messaging applications, from allowing anonymous users. Authorities could block messaging applications and platforms that failed to comply with the requirements to restrict anonymous accounts.

There were reports of politically motivated cyberattacks.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government severely restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provided for freedom of assembly, but local authorities restricted this right. The law required organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, or marches by more than one person to notify the government, although authorities maintained that protest organizers had to 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 officers, 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. COVID-19-related restrictions on mass events, which were used to restrict or ban public demonstrations, remained in place in some local jurisdictions despite the federal government lifting pandemic measures in July 2022.

Although they did not require official approval, authorities restricted single-person pickets and required there be at least 55 yards separating protesters from each other. By law, police could stop a single-person picket to protect the health and safety of the picketer. The law imposed financial reporting requirements, prohibited protests or public demonstrations near agencies that performed “emergency operational services” (such as law enforcement agencies), and imposed restrictions on journalists covering these events. In addition, the law prohibited “foreign sources of funding” financing public

demonstrations and treated single-person pickets, if held in the general vicinity of other picketers, as “mass demonstrations without a permit,” which were banned. Authorities regularly detained single-person picketers.

Peaceful protest activity related to the war against Ukraine and its associated military mobilization was severely restricted. Media reported authorities detained at least 54 persons at antiwar protests across the country marking the anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For example, three Moscow residents were arrested and fined for allegedly discrediting the army after visiting the monument to Ukrainian writer Lesya Ukrainka on February 24. According to OVD-Info, as of September 27, 19,814 individuals had been detained at antiwar protests following Russia’s February 2022 invasion.

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

The law imposed a fine for conviction of destroying infrastructure facilities and blocking roads and a 10-year prison sentence in the case of death of

more than one person.

The law provided heavy penalties for engaging in unsanctioned protests and other violations of public assembly law. Protesters convicted of multiple violations within six months could be fined substantially or imprisoned for up to five years. The law prohibited “involving a minor in participation in an unsanctioned gathering,” which was 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.

Police often broke up protests that were not officially sanctioned, at times using disproportionate force. For example, on March 20, Moscow police broke up a presentation featuring the comic books of imprisoned artist Aleksandra Skochilenko, beating and detaining several attendees, including journalists covering the event. Skochilenko was detained in April 2022 on charges of disseminating false information regarding the army after she replaced price tags in a local supermarket with antiwar slogans. She faced 10 years in prison if convicted. There were reports the government penalized employees for their participation in or support of unsanctioned assemblies. Media reported several instances in which authorities charged individuals for their alleged participation in or other support of the demonstrations even when the individual charged was already detained or the statute of limitations for that particular charge had expired.

The courts rarely acknowledged violations of citizens' rights to assemble.

Freedom of Association

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

The government used the "foreign agents" law, which required NGOs and individuals that received foreign funding and engaged in "political activity" to register as "foreign agents," to harass, stigmatize, and, in some cases, halt their operation. The law also applied to unregistered NGOs and loosely defined "public associations." On July 26, President Putin signed amendments broadly expanding the definition of those who could be designated foreign agents, further increasing fines for violating the foreign agent law, barring foreign agents from participation in fundamental aspects of civic life, and permitting unscheduled inspections not only of the foreign agents themselves but also any individuals who interacted with them. In December 2022, President Putin signed into law amendments that increased penalties for failing to comply with the "foreign agent" law. In 2022, the law was amended to expand the definition of "foreign agents" to include anyone who was "under foreign influence," a change critics said made it even easier for the state to target its domestic critics. Individuals designated as foreign

agents were banned from joining the civil service, participating in electoral commissions, acting in an advisory capacity in official or public roles, teaching or engaging in educational activities for children, and participating in the organization of public assemblies. The law also permitted authorities to designate a for-profit entity as a “foreign agent.” In 2022, the Ministry of Justice combined the several existing “foreign agent” registers into a single unified list with uniform regulatory requirements. 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 had to submit an application to the Ministry of Justice with evidence demonstrating 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 had to return 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 required NGOs on the foreign agents list to identify themselves as “foreign agents” in all their public materials. Authorities fined NGOs for failing to disclose their “foreign agent” status on websites or printed materials.

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.

In July 2022, the law was expanded to create a registry of individuals determined to be “persons affiliated with foreign agents.” The law classified the contents of the registry as secret, but a June report by the State Duma Committee on Foreign Interference stated the register included the names and personal information of 861 individuals as of December 2022.

The law required the Ministry of Justice to maintain a list of “undesirable foreign organizations.” The list expanded during the year to 124 organizations as of December 20.

By law a foreign organization could be found “undesirable” if it was deemed “dangerous to the foundations of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, its national security, and defense.” Authorities did not clarify what specific threats these “undesirable” NGOs posed to the country. Any

foreign organization deemed “undesirable” was required to cease its activities. Any money or assets found by authorities could be seized, and any citizens found guilty of continuing to work with the organization in contravention of the law could face up to seven years in prison. A 2021 law prohibited Russian citizens in any country from taking part in the work of NGOs designated as undesirable in Russia and from transferring money to the country from certain countries under monitoring by the Federal Financial Monitoring Service, regardless of the transferred amount.

Authorities imposed criminal penalties for purported violations of the law on “undesirable foreign organizations.” For example, on August 17, less than one month before regional elections, Investigative Committee officers detained Grigory Melkonyants, co-chair of leading election monitoring group Golos, and charged him with carrying out the activities of an “undesirable organization.” He faced up to six years in prison if convicted.

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

Authorities continued to misuse the country’s expansive definition of extremism to stifle freedom of association. The law prohibited members of “extremist” organizations from participating in all federal, regional, and local

elections. An organization's founders and leaders were barred from running for elected office for five years from the date of the organization's ban, while members and others "involved in its work" were barred for three years. The courts could deem a person to be "involved" if that individual made a statement of support for the group, transferred money to it, or offered any other form of "assistance." The ban could also apply retroactively, barring individuals from running for office if they were involved with the group up to three years prior to the extremist designation. Experts and political activists decried the law as politically motivated and unconstitutional.

In multiple cases authorities arbitrarily arrested and prosecuted civil society activists in political retaliation for their work.

There were reports authorities targeted NGOs and activists representing LGBTQI+ persons for retaliation.

Authorities misused antiterrorism and antiextremism laws, as well as other measures, to label wrongfully peaceful religious groups and their practices "terrorist," "extremist," and "undesirable." Among those designated without any credible evidence of violent actions or intentions were two foreign-based Church of Scientology organizations, four Protestant groups from Latvia and Ukraine, a regional branch of Falun Gong and seven Falun Gong-associated NGOs, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Fayzrakhmani Islamic community, Tablighi Jamaat, followers of the Muslim theologian Said Nursi,

and Hizb ut-Tahrir. These designations effectively banned the worship and activities of these groups, and members were subject to prolonged imprisonment, harsh detention conditions, house arrest and house raids, discrimination, harassment, and criminal investigation for participating in the activities of a banned organization.

There were reports civil society activists were beaten or attacked in retaliation for their professional activities and that in most cases law enforcement officers did not adequately investigate the incidents.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but authorities restricted these rights.

In-country Movement: Although the law gave citizens the right to choose their place of residence, adult citizens had to carry government-issued internal passports while traveling domestically and had to register with local authorities after arriving at a different location. To have their files transferred, persons with official refugee or asylum status had to 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 provided for freedom to travel abroad, but the government restricted this right for certain groups. The law stipulated a person who violated a court decision did not have a right to leave the country. A court could also prohibit a person from leaving the country for failure to satisfy debts; if the individual was suspected, accused, or convicted of a crime; or if the individual had access to classified material.

The government restricted the foreign travel of millions of its employees, prescribing which countries they were allowed to visit. The restriction applied to employees of agencies including the Prosecutor General's Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Federal Prison Service, Federal Drug Control Service, Federal Bailiff Service, General Administration for Migration Issues, and Ministry of Emergency Situations. In 2021, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin signed a decree stating that prior to traveling abroad, his deputies and ministers had to obtain his written permission. The travel restriction applied to lower-ranking officials, such as heads of

agencies, who had to obtain permission from their supervisors before travel. On June 13, President Putin signed into law amendments that required military conscripts to hand over their passports to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the duration of their service.

Citizenship: There were reports the government revoked or sought to revoke citizenship on an arbitrary or discriminatory basis. For example, in 2022, a court in Moscow region invalidated the citizenship of Arshak Makichyan, a Russian climate activist born in Armenia, along with that of his father and two brothers. Makichyan told media authorities sought to revoke his citizenship due to his public position against Russia's war against Ukraine. On April 28, President Putin signed a law that allowed authorities to revoke the citizenship of naturalized Russian citizens for discrediting or spreading "false" information regarding the armed forces and for actions considered a national security threat.

e. Protection of Refugees

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported it had a working relationship with the government on asylum, refugee, and stateless-persons problems, but, despite its frequent requests, access was "rare, sporadic, and not unfettered." Human rights defenders reported, however, the government failed to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, returning refugees, asylum

seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern. A 2021 law adopted the charter of the International Organization for Migration, which promoted the organized movement of migrants and refugees.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had an established system for providing protection to refugees. NGOs reported applicants commonly paid informal “facilitation fees” of approximately 33,000 rubles (\$445) to General Administration for Migration Issues adjudicators to have their application reviewed. Applicants who did not speak Russian often had to pay for a private interpreter. Human rights organizations noted 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. The General Administration for Migration Issues approved only a small percentage of applications for refugee status and temporary asylum, with the exception of applications from Ukrainians, who had a much higher chance of approval. Human rights organizations noted the government’s issuance of refugee and temporary asylum status decreased during the previous few years, pointing to the government’s systematic and arbitrary refusal to grant asylum. NGOs reported 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 the General Administration for Migration Issues had not renewed the temporary asylum of hundreds of Syrians and, in some cases, encouraged applicants to return to Syria.

Refoulement: The concept of nonrefoulement was 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, the General Administration for Migration Issues, did not maintain a presence at airports or other border points and did not adequately publicize that asylum seekers could 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.

Human rights groups reported authorities made improper use of international agreements that permitted 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 officers 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.

Access to Basic Services: By law successful temporary asylum seekers and persons whose applications were being processed had the right to work, to receive medical care, and to attend school. The government considered Ukrainian asylum seekers to be separate from asylum seekers from other countries, such as Afghanistan, Georgia, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen. 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 provided 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 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 June, a total of 36,524 persons held a certificate of temporary asylum in the

country. A person who did not satisfy the criteria for refugee status, but who for humanitarian reasons could not be expelled or deported, could receive temporary asylum after submitting a separate application. There were reports, however, of authorities not upholding the principle of temporary protection.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

According to the independent NGOs Civic Assistance Committee and Memorial, most IDPs 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 from the territory of North Ossetia-Alania, and the Chechen wars displaced Chechens. The government provided minimal financial support for housing to persons registered as IDPs. The Civic Assistance Committee criticized the government's strict rules for qualifying for assistance and long backlog of persons waiting for housing support. For further information regarding IDPs in the country, please see the materials of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center: <https://www.internal-displacement.org>.

g. Stateless Persons

According to the 2020 population census, the country was home to 95,193

self-declared stateless persons. Official statistics did not differentiate between stateless persons and other categories of persons seeking assistance. According to UNHCR data, there were 52,150 stateless persons, including forcibly displaced stateless persons, in the country as of June 2022. Law, policy, and procedures allowed stateless persons and their children born in the country to gain nationality. The Civic Assistance Committee noted 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. The law authorized temporary identity certificates for stateless persons valid for 10 years or until the holder received citizenship or a residence permit in another country.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

While the law provided citizens the right 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 severely limited the ability of opposition parties to organize, register candidates for public office, access media outlets, and conduct political campaigns.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections were widely reported to not be fair and free of abuses and irregularities. The September 2021 national elections for the State Duma were neither free nor fair, according to an election observation NGO. Observers cited fraud and electoral law violations during voting and vote counting that undermined public confidence in the elections and cast serious doubt on the integrity of the reported results. Ahead of the elections, authorities intensified repression of independent observers and media, including by designating the independent election observation group Golos and dozens of media outlets and individuals as “foreign agents,” “undesirable,” or “extremist.” Authorities disproportionately denied registration to independent and “nonsystemic” opposition candidates. Authorities harassed or restricted gatherings, campaign communications, and other political activities of opposition candidates and prodemocracy groups, often charging participants with violating COVID-19 protocols. Authorities banned many would-be candidates from running for office and pressured several to leave the country. Roskomnadzor blocked or entirely removed “certain” online campaign materials during federal or regional elections, including 49 websites linked to opposition figure Aleksey Navalny.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported the 2018 presidential election “took place in an overly controlled

environment, marked by continued pressure on critical voices” and “restrictions on the fundamental freedoms, as well as on candidate registration... resulted in a lack of genuine competition.” Observers noted the most prominent potential challenger, Aleksey Navalny, was prevented from registering his candidacy due to a previous politically motivated criminal conviction and incarceration.

During the September 10 regional elections, pro-Kremlin candidates won all gubernatorial races and maintained large majorities in regional parliaments and major city councils in which elections were held. Independent monitors alleged widespread voting irregularities, including harassment of observers, ballot-stuffing, carousel voting, and extensive violations of rules governing the security of ballots. Independent observers assessed electronic voting systems to be insufficiently transparent and potentially conducive to facilitation of electoral fraud.

In parallel with the country’s September regional elections, Russian authorities organized sham “elections” on territories of Ukraine occupied by Russia in violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The process for nominating candidates for the office of the president was highly regulated and placed significant burdens on opposition parties and their candidates. While parties represented in the State Duma could nominate a presidential candidate without having to collect and submit signatures, prospective self-

nominated presidential candidates were required to 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 had to collect 100,000 signatures. An independent presidential candidate was ineligible to run if the commission found more than 5 percent of signatures invalid. In June, media reported there were no independent candidates for the regional governorships contested in the September 10 regional elections, citing a statement from Sergey Perminov, deputy secretary general of the ruling United Russia party. Significant burdens existed for registering as a candidate in State Duma elections. State Duma candidates could be nominated directly by constituents, political parties in single-mandate districts, or political parties on their federal list, or could self-nominate. While any registered political party could run candidates on the party list portion of the ballot, parties that did not overcome the 5 percent threshold during the previous elections were required to collect 200,000 signatures. Self-nominated candidates had to gather the signatures of 3 percent of the voters in their districts.

Observers reported similar rules for nominating candidates for regional heads requiring the support of municipal deputies – known as the “municipal filter” – were not applied equally. Authorities pressured municipal deputies not to provide signatures to certain candidates, preventing competitive independent candidates from passing through the

municipal filter, while progovernment candidates were able to pass through the filter without fulfilling technical requirements. In a July report, Golos assessed the municipal filter would prevent real competition in the September 10 regional elections. In December 2022, Yabloko Party Pskov Regional chair Lev Shlosberg announced his party would not put forward a candidate for governor, citing the municipal filter. On June 16, the Ministry of Justice added Shlosberg to its foreign agent list.

Opposition parties were repeatedly denied registration or faced court-mandated suspensions of their activities. Authorities used restrictive laws on “foreign agents,” “extremism,” and “discrediting” the armed forces to block dozens of candidates from running for office or portray them as unpatriotic.

Systemic opposition parties (i.e., parties that were quasi-independent but generally loyal to the Kremlin and permitted to occupy seats in the Duma) also faced pressure. According to a July Golos report, federal authorities put increased pressure on systemic opposition parties in the wake of the February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For example, Golos alleged authorities put forward “spoiler candidates” from the Communists of Russia Party to challenge candidates from the similarly named Communist Party of Russia (KPRF) in the September 10 regional elections. In August, media reported the Communists of Russia were running “doppelganger” candidates with the same or similar names to KPRF candidates.

There were reports government resources were used for campaign purposes. For example, state entities or entities closely aligned with the state influenced their employees to vote a certain way or in a specific location. Intense repression against civil society organizations limited their ability to monitor and comment on election processes. Authorities restricted speech related to the war against Ukraine and maintained COVID-19-related restrictions on public gatherings that effectively banned traditional campaign events).

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable

Groups: No laws limited participation of women and members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Women's participation remained low, accounting for approximately 18 percent of elected seats in the national legislature. As of September, only three out of 31 members of the Russian cabinet were women. 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. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for official corruption. The government generally did not implement 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 was a problem. Official corruption was rampant in numerous areas, including education, military conscription, health care, commerce, housing, social welfare, law enforcement, and the judicial system. There were reports of corruption by government officials at the highest level. In June, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project reported President Putin's eldest daughter Maria Vorontsova frequently stayed at a \$12 million ski chalet in Austria that was purchased by a Cypriot shell company with a well-concealed loan from Arkady Rotenberg, Putin's childhood friend.

Authorities selectively sentenced officials for conviction of corruption-related charges. For example, in March, a Moscow court sentenced the former head of the Investigations Department of the Federal Customs Service, Aleksandr Kizlyk, to 10 years in prison for conviction of abuse of authority. Prosecutors accused Kizlyk and other customs officials of helping individuals smuggle large amounts of currency through airports in Moscow.

For additional information regarding corruption in the country, see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

An increasingly limited number of domestic and international human rights groups operating in the country monitored and investigated human rights conditions or cases and published their findings despite increasing government restrictions. Government officials were rarely cooperative or responsive to their concerns and sometimes responded by increasing repression of such groups. 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.

Some officials, including High Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Moskalkova and her regional representatives, regularly interacted and cooperated with NGOs. Officials often displayed hostility toward human rights organizations, suggested their work was unpatriotic and detrimental

to national security, and refused to cooperate with NGOs that were critical of government activities or were listed as a foreign agent. For international NGOs, authorities regularly refused visas for staff and used a variety of laws to restrict their access and operations. International human rights NGOs had almost no presence east of the Ural Mountains or in the North Caucasus, where a few local NGOs addressed human rights problems but often chose not to work on politically sensitive topics to avoid retaliation by local authorities.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: 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. On January 26, the Moscow City Court ordered the closure of the Moscow Helsinki Group at the request of the Ministry of Justice over purported administrative violations such as participating in events “outside of their region.” The Moscow Helsinki Group was the country’s oldest human rights organization, established in 1976 in the Soviet Union. On April 28, the Moscow City Court closed the SOVA Information and Analytical Center and on August 18, the Sakharov Center for alleged “violations” that independent observers widely characterized as spurious. On May 22, the FSB opened a criminal investigation into the Center of Historical Memory in Perm, a successor to the human rights organization Memorial liquidated in 2022. Authorities accused seven human rights defenders working for the center of trying to illegally export Memorial’s archives to Germany. During the year,

authorities designated numerous NGOs as “undesirable organizations,” including Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, the Agora Human Rights Association, and the Russian Anti-War Committee in Sweden.

Authorities used laws passed after the country’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, such as those criminalizing the discrediting of or publishing “false information” regarding the army, to target domestic human rights advocates. On March 21, the Investigative Committee opened a criminal case against Oleg Orlov, cochair of the now liquidated Memorial Human Rights Center, for repeatedly “discrediting” the army. On October 11, Orlov was convicted and fined 150,000 rubles (\$1,657).

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: In 2022, the UN General Assembly suspended Russia from the UN Human Rights Council due to Russia’s human rights violations in Ukraine. As a result of the country’s expulsion from the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), of the Council of Europe that adjudicates the European Convention on Human Rights, stopped taking cases alleging actions by Russia. The State Duma also adopted two laws that purported to end the ECHR’s jurisdiction in Russia. Amnesty International stated the country’s withdrawal meant “some of the last safeguards against human rights abuses will be off limits to those who need them most in today’s Russia.”

Authorities refused to cooperate with the OSCE’s Moscow Mechanism rapporteur tasked with looking into the country’s fulfillment of the

provisions of the OSCE human dimension in the wake of its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Authorities also still had not provided a substantive response to a 2018 OSCE Moscow Mechanism report investigating human rights abuses in Chechnya.

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 was 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 appointed some council members by decree, and not all members operated independently. Experts noted Council Head Valeriy Fadeyev, a senior member of the United Russia Party, worked closely with government authorities and often echoed their assessment of well-known human rights cases. 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 and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape and provided the same punishment for a relative, including a spouse or domestic partner, who committed rape as for a nonrelative. The penalty for conviction of rape was 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 local police officers sometimes refused to respond to rape or domestic violence calls unless the survivor's life was directly threatened. Authorities typically did not consider rape or attempted rape to be life threatening.

Domestic violence remained a significant problem. The law contained no domestic violence provision nor a legal definition of domestic violence, making it difficult to know its actual prevalence in the country. The law considered beatings by "close relatives" an administrative rather than a criminal offense for first-time offenders, provided the beating did not cause serious harm requiring hospital treatment. The antidomestic-violence NGO ANNA Center estimated 70 percent of women who experienced domestic violence did not seek help due to fear of retribution from a partner, public

shame, lack of financial independence from their partners, or lack of confidence in law enforcement authorities. Laws addressing bodily harm were general in nature and did not permit police to initiate a criminal investigation unless the survivor filed a complaint. The burden of collecting evidence in such cases typically fell on the survivors through a process known as private prosecution, which the ANNA Center stated severely disadvantaged survivors. The law prohibited threats, assault, battery, and killing, but most acts of domestic violence did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Prosecutor's Office. The law did not provide for protection orders; experts believed protection orders could be a tool to keep women safe from experiencing recurrent violence by their partners.

On February 7, the ECHR ruled Russian authorities violated Article 3 of the European Convention against Torture during an investigation into the alleged sexual abuse of a minor. The survivor alleged investigators interviewed her 23 times and put her in direct contact with her abusers, resulting in her retraumatization. In 2021, the ECHR ruled in a separate case that Russian authorities had violated the European Convention on Human Rights by failing to establish a legal framework for combating the "staggering scale" of domestic violence and holding the perpetrators to account.

According to NGOs, police were often unwilling to register complaints of domestic violence, stating cases were "family matters," frequently

discouraged survivors from submitting complaints, and often pressed survivors to reconcile with abusers. Most 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 only 3 percent of such cases eventually reached the courts. Survivors of domestic violence in the North Caucasus experienced difficulty seeking protection from authorities. There were reports women defending themselves from domestic violence were charged with crimes.

NGOs noted government-operated institutions provided services to affected women such as social apartments, hospital wards, and shelters. Access to these services was often complicated, since they required proof of residency in that municipality, as well as proof of low-income status. In many cases, these documents were controlled by the abusers and not available to survivors.

There were reports government agents incited, perpetrated, and condoned gender-based violence in the course of the country's war in Ukraine.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law did not specifically prohibit FGM/C. NGOs in Dagestan reported FGM/C was occasionally practiced in some villages.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: Human rights

groups reported so-called honor killings of women persisted in Chechnya, Dagestan, and elsewhere in the North Caucasus, but the cases were rarely reported or acknowledged. Local police, doctors, and lawyers often collaborated with the families involved to cover up the crimes. In parts of the North Caucasus, women and girls faced bride kidnapping, polygamy, forced marriage (including early and child marriage), legal discrimination, virginity testing 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 prohibited women from living in a house without a man. The law did not prohibit sexual harassment, although the law contained general prohibitions against compelling a person to perform actions of a sexual character by means of blackmail or threats, or by taking advantage of the survivor's economic or other dependence on the perpetrator. There were no criminal or civil remedies for sexual harassment experienced in the workplace. Sexual harassment was reportedly widespread, but courts often rejected survivors' claims due to lack of sufficient evidence.

Discrimination: The constitution and law provided the same legal status and rights for women and men, but women often encountered significant restrictions. Women experienced discrimination in employment, occupation, and access to credit. Employers often preferred to hire men to save on perceived maternity and child-care costs. While the law prohibited employer discrimination in posting job vacancy information such as requests

for specific gender and age, vacancy announcements sometimes specified gender and age requirements or a desired physical appearance. The law prohibited women from holding 100 jobs deemed hazardous and arduous, including firefighting, mining, construction, factory work, agriculture, energy, transportation and steam boiler repair.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities during the year, although there had been such reports in previous years.

There were significant social and cultural barriers to family planning and reproductive health in the North Caucasus republics, including cases of FGM/C.

There were no legal restrictions on access to contraceptives, but very few citizens received any kind of sexual education, hampering their effectiveness. Senior government officials and church and conservative groups in the country stridently advocated for increasing the birth rate, and their opposition to family planning initiatives contributed to a social stigma that also affected the use of contraceptives.

Access to family planning and skilled medical attendance at birth varied widely based on geography and was often extremely limited in rural areas.

The government did not deny access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence, but survivors did not always seek

needed treatment due to social stigma. Emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis was readily available as part of clinical management of rape in urban centers but not necessarily in rural areas.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law prohibited 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 police officers often stopped individuals who looked foreign and asked them for their documents, claiming they contained mistakes even when they were in order, and demanded bribes.

There were reports Russian authorities disproportionately mobilized members of non-Russian ethnic groups to fight in the war against Ukraine.

Hate crimes targeting ethnic minorities were a problem. According to a 2018 report by the human rights group Antidiscrimination Center Memorial, Roma faced widespread discrimination in access to resources and basic utilities; 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.

During the year the government sought to repress expressions of ethnic identity, including calls for the preservation of minority languages and cultures. On March 13, the Ministry of Justice designated the Free Buryatiya Foundation as a foreign agent. Established in March 2022, Free Buryatiya opposed the war in Ukraine and provided legal aid for ethnic Buryats seeking to avoid military service. In February, the Ministry of Interior added Free Buryatiya cofounder and journalist Aleksandra Garmazhapova to its federal wanted list on unspecified charges. Garmazhapova resided outside the country.

Indigenous Peoples

The constitution and various statutes provided 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 threatened 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 Antidiscrimination Center 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 communities; and repression of activists and employees of social organizations, including the fabrication of criminal

cases.”

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

Children

Birth Registration: Failure to register a birth resulted in the denial of public services.

Education: Education was 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 did not have a law on child abuse, but the law prohibited murder, battery, and rape. The penalties for conviction of such crimes ranged from five to 15 years in prison and, if they resulted in the death of a child, up to 20 years in prison. The law provided a maximum

penalty of life in prison for those previously convicted of child molestation, who carried out repeated sexual actions against children, or for first-time offenders whose crime affected two or more children or was accompanied by another grievous crime. The law that stipulated beatings by “close relatives” were an administrative rather than a criminal offense for first-time offenders, provided the beating did not cause serious harm requiring hospital treatment, applied to children as well. Some State Duma deputies claimed children needed discipline and authority in the family, condoning beating as a mode of discipline.

Studies indicated violence against children was common. According to a report published in 2019 by the National Institute for Child Protection, one in four parents admitted to having beaten their children at least once with a belt.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage was 18. Local authorities could authorize marriage from age 16 under certain circumstances. More than a dozen regions allowed marriage from age 14 under special circumstances, such as pregnancy or the birth of a child. Authorities did not enforce the law consistently across different regions.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The age of consent was 16. The law prohibited the commercial sexual exploitation, sale, offering, or procuring of children for commercial sexual exploitation, and practices related to child pornography. Authorities generally enforced the law.

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

Roskomnadzor had the power to shut down any website immediately and without due process until its owners proved its content did not include child pornography.

Antisemitism

The 2010 census estimated the Jewish population at slightly more than 150,000. The Russian Jewish Congress (RJC) estimated the Jewish population at 172,500, while the Federation of Jewish Communities estimated there were 1.5 million persons of Jewish heritage.

In 2022, the RJC reported there were no cases of attacks motivated by antisemitism and five acts of vandalism against Jewish sites. According to RJC, courts handed down convictions in 19 cases involving antisemitism. There were 249 sentences issued for conviction of inciting ethnic hatred.

Public officials manipulated the history of World War Two and the Holocaust for political purposes. President Putin and other leaders used Nazi imagery

and antisemitic tropes to justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, repeatedly claiming they were invading in order to “denazify” Ukraine and attempting to draw parallels between Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the fight against Nazi Germany. At a January 18 press conference, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the United States of assembling a coalition of European countries to “solve the ‘Russian question’ just as Hitler wanted the final solution to the ‘Jewish question.’” The European Jewish Congress condemned Lavrov’s statement as “Holocaust distortion at the most basic level” and called on him to apologize.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law did not criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behaviors, but a law prohibited gender transition procedures and gender affirming care (see below), and authorities used laws prohibiting the promotion of “nontraditional sexual relations” to justify the

arbitrary arrest of LGBTQI+ persons.

Violence and Harassment: There were reports state actors committed violence against LGBTQI+ individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, particularly in Chechnya. There were reports government agents attacked, harassed, and threatened LGBTQI+ activists. There were instances of nonstate actor violence targeting LGBTQI+ persons and of police often failing to respond adequately to such incidents.

For example, media reported that on February 15, Moscow airport police arbitrarily arrested and forcibly disappeared Idris Arsamikov as he returned to the Netherlands after attending his father's funeral in Chechnya. In 2018, Arsamikov fled Russia following his detention and torture by Chechen police in connection with his presumed homosexuality. According to media, Shelkovsky District police in Chechnya refused to disclose his whereabouts, and the Investigative Committee in Chechnya refused to investigate his disappearance.

A 2022 report from the Coming Out and the Sphere Foundation showed 7 percent of LGBTQI+ respondents in a survey experienced physical violence, 8 percent experienced sexual violence, and 13 percent experienced blackmail or extortion. Many respondents, particularly transgender individuals, reported they believed they were more vulnerable and unsafe in the wake of the country's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The report also noted transgender persons were uniquely vulnerable to violence. The Sphere

Foundation claimed law enforcement authorities did not always protect the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals and were sometimes the source of violence themselves. As a result, LGBTQI+ individuals had extremely low levels of trust in courts and police.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state or nonstate actors against LGBTQI+ persons with respect to essential goods and services such as housing, employment, or access to government services such as health care. LGBTQI+ persons reported significant societal stigma and discrimination, which some attributed to official promotion of homophobia, including campaigns on state-controlled media that derided LGBTQI+ persons as “perverts” and conflated homosexuality with pedophilia. Activists asserted most LGBTQI+ persons hid their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace due to fear of losing their jobs or homes, as well as the risk of violence. LGBTQI+ students reported discrimination at schools and universities. Medical practitioners reportedly continued to limit or deny LGBTQI+ persons health services due to intolerance and prejudice; the Russian LGBT Network reported LGBTQI+ individuals seeking health care often encountered strong negative reactions and the presumption they were mentally ill. There were reports LGBTQI+ persons faced discrimination in parental rights. According to the 2022 Coming Out/Sphere report, LGBTQI+ individuals reported experiencing an increase in discrimination following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: On July 24, President Putin signed a law banning legal gender recognition, medical interventions aimed at changing the sex of a person, and gender-affirming care. The only exception was for medical interventions to treat congenital anomalies. The law also annulled marriages in which one person “changed gender” and barred transgender individuals from becoming foster or adoptive parents. On March 16, a court in Tyumen invalidated a marriage after one spouse changed their gender identity marker on legal documents.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: There were reports of LGBTQI+ persons being targeted for involuntary “conversion therapy.” On June 26, Radio Liberty reported a student, age 22, was forced by his parents to undergo conversion-therapy treatment at the Inextinguishable Hope center in the Ramensky District of Moscow Region. There were reports police conducted involuntary physical exams of transgender or intersex persons. The Association of Russian-speaking Intersex reported medical specialists often pressured intersex persons (or their parents if they were underage) into having so-called normalization surgery without providing accurate information regarding the procedure or what being intersex meant.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: On November 30, the Supreme Court granted a Ministry of Justice request to designate the “international LGBT public movement” as an extremist

organization. No such formal organization existed, leading to widespread concerns the designation could allow authorities to arbitrarily target any LGBTQI+ person or advocate for the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons with criminal charges. During the year, authorities developed and issued implementing regulations for amendments adopted in December 2022 that broadened the law criminalizing the distribution of “propaganda” of “nontraditional sexual relations” to children. The law effectively limited the rights of free expression and assembly for citizens who wished to advocate publicly for the rights of LGBTQI+ persons or express the opinion that homosexuality was normal. The law completely banned such “propaganda” among persons of all ages through media, including the internet, advertising, literature, and cinema. The law also banned the sale of goods containing “prohibited information” and gave Roskomnadzor the authority to monitor and block entities that distributed “prohibited information.” Under the law, individuals faced significant administrative fines for “LGBT propaganda” or “demonstrations of LGBT and information that encourages a change of gender among teenagers.” These fines were significantly greater for legal entities.

Roskomnadzor used the law to block websites and file administrative charges against numerous individuals and legal entities, including bookstores, theaters, and media companies. For example, on August 2, a St. Petersburg court fined state-owned digital services provider Rostelecom one million rubles (\$10,200) for broadcasting films such as *The Curse of Chucky*

showing “nontraditional sexual relations.” In another example, on May 4, a Moscow court fined Yan Dvorkin, the leader of the Center T Group, which assisted transgender and nonbinary persons, 100,000 rubles (\$1,260) for disseminating “LGBT propaganda.” Dvorkin was denounced by Moscow’s child protection services, who monitored Dvorkin’s adopted child, and accused the activist of “LGBT propaganda” in relation to his online descriptions of his relationship with his partner.

Authorities used the law on propaganda of “nontraditional sexual relations” and other laws, such as the foreign agent law, to pressure LGBTQI+ rights organizations. For example, on April 14, the Ministry of Justice designated the Rainbow Association, an LGBTQI+ human rights organization, as a foreign agent.

Persons with Disabilities

The law provided 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 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 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.

Persons with disabilities faced discrimination in employment and occupation.

Federal law required buildings to 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 had trouble accessing public transportation and had to rely on private cars. Wheelchair-accessible street curbs were not widely available in many regions.

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

While the law mandated inclusive education for children with disabilities, authorities generally segregated them from mainstream society through a system that institutionalized them through adulthood and left them lacking

social, educational, and vocational skills. The government began to implement inclusive education, but many children with disabilities did not study in mainstream schools due to a lack of accommodations to facilitate their individual learning needs. Even when children were allowed to attend a mainstream school, staff lacked the capacity and resources to meet the educational needs of the child.

There was no clear standardized mechanism to contest 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. Official commissions designated children with developmental disabilities at age three: the designations “imbecile” and “idiot” signified authorities considered the child uneducable, while the designation “weak” (having a slight cognitive or intellectual disability) followed an individual on official documents after graduation from state institutions, creating barriers to employment and housing. These designations were almost always irrevocable.

Institutionalized Children: In many cases, persons with intellectual or physical disabilities were confined to institutions where they were often subjected to abuse and neglect. A 2019 government audit found abuses in 87 percent of institutions for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. There were reports of neglect as well as physical and psychological abuse in state institutions for children. NGOs reported

children with disabilities were especially vulnerable to low-quality care at institutions due to a lack of resources and inadequate reforms. NGOs noted many had limited access to social services and teachers or counselors.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Persons with HIV faced significant legal discrimination, social stigma, barriers to accessing health care, and employment discrimination. The law allowed individuals with HIV to adopt children only if they met strict criteria, but in many cases they faced barriers to adopting. According to NGO activists, men who had sex with men were unlikely to be tested and seek antiretroviral treatment due to stigma and fear of exposure, while individuals in commercial sex avoided testing and treatment due to threats from law enforcement authorities. Many individuals who injected drugs did not seek testing and treatment because of the country's aggressive criminalization of illegal drugs and marginalization of users. Younger women faced multiple barriers to accessing testing and treatment because of stigma, discrimination, harmful gender stereotypes, gender-based violence, and difficulties accessing reproductive health care. By law, foreign citizens who were HIV-positive could be deported, but the law barred deportation if the individual had a Russian national or permanent resident spouse, child, or parents. Economic migrants concealed their HIV status and avoided treatment due to fear of deportation. Children with HIV faced discrimination in education, and NGOs reported younger children with HIV

faced resistance by other parents when enrolling in schools. The Ministry of Justice designated HIV-related NGOs as foreign agents, limiting their services to the community. On June 7, the Community Center “Action” in St. Petersburg stopped operations after the Ministry of Justice labeled it a foreign agent. The center provided support to the LGBTQI+ community and worked to stop the spread of HIV.

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.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided for workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination but did not require employers to reinstate workers fired due to their union activity. The law prohibited reprisals against striking workers. Unions were required to register with the Federal Registration Service, often a cumbersome process that included lengthy delays and convoluted bureaucracy. The grounds on which trade union registration could be

denied were not defined and could be arbitrary or unjustified. The law required labor unions to be independent of government bodies, employers, political parties, and NGOs. Authorities used “foreign agent” designations to impede the activity of independent trade unions.

The law placed several restrictions on the right to bargain collectively. For example, only one collective bargaining agreement was permitted per enterprise, and only a union or group of unions representing at least one-half the workforce could bargain collectively. The law allowed workers to elect representatives if there was no union, but the law did not specify who had authority to bargain collectively when there was no trade union in an enterprise. The government had absolute discretion in determining whether a union had standing to bargain.

Public-sector workers were provided fewer freedom of association rights. Active-duty members of the military, civil servants, customs workers, judges, prosecutors, and persons working under civil contracts were excluded from the right to organize.

The right to strike was enshrined in the constitution, but the law restricted this right. Advanced notification requirements as well as excessive formalities and requirements made it difficult to initiate 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. The law prohibited strikes in the military, emergency response services, and in

essential public-service sectors, including utilities and transportation. It prohibited strikes threatening the country's defense, safety, and the life and health of its workers. The law prohibited nonessential public servants and workers from a broad range of industries defined as essential from striking. The definition of essential services was beyond what the International Labor Organization generally considered essential. The law imposed compulsory arbitration for railroad, postal, and municipal workers, as well as public servants in roles other than law enforcement.

Union members had to follow extensive legal requirements and engage in consultations with employers before striking. Solidarity strikes and strikes on matters related to state policies were illegal, as were strikes that did not respect onerous time limits, procedures, and requirements mandated by law. Employers could hire workers to replace strikers. Workers had to 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 was intended to start, its duration and the number of anticipated participants; the name of the body that was leading the strike and the representatives authorized to participate in conciliation procedures; and proposals for the minimum service to be provided during the strike. In the event a declared strike was ruled illegal but still took place, courts could confiscate union property to cover employers' losses.

The Federal Labor and Employment Service (RosTrud) regulated employer compliance with labor law and was 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, Prosecutor’s Office, RosTrud, and Ministry of Internal Affairs, were responsible for enforcing the law. These agencies, however, frequently failed to enforce laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. Violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining provisions were common. Penalties for violations were less than those under other similar laws related to civil rights. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

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.

The government used laws on foreign agents, discrediting the army, and other provisions to pressure trade unionists. In February, a Moscow court sentenced Kirill Ukraintsev to 16 months in prison for conviction of participating in unauthorized gatherings. In April 2022, he was arrested as he organized a courier and taxi driver strike. In another example, in July, labor activist and Moscow State University professor Mikhail Lobanov fled

the country after the Ministry of Justice labeled him a foreign agent and the university fired him. In May, police detained Lobanov for allegedly spreading false information regarding the war in Ukraine.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *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 prohibited all worst forms of child labor, explicitly prohibiting work in unhealthy or dangerous conditions, underground work, or jobs that could endanger a child's health and moral development. The law prohibited the employment of children younger than 16 in most cases and regulated the working conditions of children younger than 18. The law permitted children at age 14 to work under certain conditions and with the approval of a parent or guardian. Such work could not threaten the child's health or welfare. RosTrud was responsible for inspecting enterprises and organizations to identify violations of labor and occupational health standards for children. The government effectively enforced the law and regularly applied penalties against violators, although those penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for other serious crimes.

There were no available nationally representative data on the prevalence of child labor in the country, although children reportedly worked in the informal 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.

In July, investigative journalists alleged a factory in a special economic zone in Tatarstan was using underage students from Alabuga Polytechnic University to assemble Iranian drones. According to interviews with students and parents, children as young as 15 were forced to work exceedingly long hours, often without proper breaks or meals, and under hostile conditions that deeply affected their mental health.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provided for a minimum wage for all sectors, which was above the poverty income level. Some local governments had minimum wage rates higher than the national rate. The law provided for standard work hours, overtime, and annual leave. The standard work week could not exceed 40 hours. Employers could not request overtime work from pregnant women, workers younger than 18, and other categories of employees specified by federal law. The law stipulated payment for overtime had to be at least 150 percent for the first two hours and not less

than 200 percent after that; employees could request additional holiday leave in lieu of overtime. Overtime work could not exceed four hours in a two-day period or 120 hours in a year for each employee.

Nonpayment of wages was a criminal offense punishable by fines, compulsory labor, or imprisonment, but nonpayment or late payment of wages remained widespread across all sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate within the main industries. The law established minimum conditions for workplace safety and worker health, but it did not explicitly allow workers to remove themselves from hazardous workplaces without threat to their employment. The law entitled foreigners working in the country to the same rights and protections as citizens.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: RosTrud was responsible for enforcing minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws and made efforts to effectively enforce those laws, although the number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce the law in all sectors. Serious breaches of OSH provisions and nonpayment of wages were criminal offenses. Penalties for wage, hour, and OSH violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions, although there were significant restrictions on inspectors'

authority to inspect workplaces. Experts pointed to prevention of these offenses, rather than adequacy of available punishment, as the main challenge to protection of worker rights. RosTrud noted that state labor inspectors needed additional professional training and that the agency needed additional inspectors to enforce consistent compliance. Although the labor inspectorate frequently referred cases for potential criminal prosecution, few of these cases were instituted by the Prosecutor's Office. In addition, courts routinely canceled decisions and penalties imposed by labor inspectors.

Rosstat estimated 20.3 percent of the workforce or approximately 15 million persons were informally employed in 2021. Labor law and protections applied to workers in the informal sector but were rarely enforced.