

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	742
Land:	Rusland
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	2022. Country Report on Human Rights Practices Russia
Udgivet:	20. marts 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. juni 2023

RUSSIA 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Russian Federation has a highly centralized, authoritarian political system dominated by President Vladimir Putin. The bicameral Federal Assembly consists of a directly elected lower house (State Duma) and an appointed upper house (Federation Council), both of which lack independence from the executive. The 2018 presidential election and the September 2021 parliamentary elections were marked by accusations of government interference and manipulation of the electoral process, including the exclusion of meaningful opposition candidates.

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

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24 and Russia's armed forces committed numerous war crimes and other atrocities and abuses. There were credible reports of summary execution, torture, rape, indiscriminate attacks, and attacks deliberately targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure by Russia's forces in Ukraine, all of which constitute war crimes. The Russian government engaged in the forced deportation of civilians from Ukraine to Russia, often following a harsh and abusive "filtration" process, and there were numerous

reports of forced deportations and adoptions of children from Ukraine. Russia's occupation and purported annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula continued to affect significantly and negatively the human rights situation there. Authorities also conducted 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: extrajudicial killings, including of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons in Chechnya by local government authorities; enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities; pervasive torture by government law enforcement officers that sometimes resulted in death and occasionally involved sexual violence or punitive psychiatric incarceration; harsh and life-threatening conditions in prisons; arbitrary arrest and detention; political and religious prisoners and detainees; transnational repression against individuals located outside the country; severe arbitrary interference with privacy; providing support to an armed group that recruited or used child soldiers; severe suppression of free expression and media, including violence against journalists and the use of "anti-extremism" and other laws to prosecute peaceful dissent and members of religious minority groups; severe restrictions on internet freedom; severe suppression of the freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on "foreign agents" and "undesirable foreign organizations"; severe restrictions of religious freedom; refoulement of refugees; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; severe limits on participation in the political process, including restrictions on opposition candidates' ability to seek public office and conduct political campaigns, and on the ability of civil society to monitor election processes; widespread corruption at all levels and in all branches of government; serious government restrictions on, including closure and harassment of, domestic and international human rights organizations; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence and violence against women; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of ethnic and religious minority groups; trafficking in persons; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons;

crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities; and the worst forms of child labor.

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

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. Impunity was a significant problem in investigating whether security force killings were justifiable (see section 1.e.).

Russian Federation representatives continued to reject requests to open an investigation into the circumstances of the 2020 poisoning of prominent opposition politician and anticorruption campaigner Aleksey Navalny by officers of the Federal Security Service. Officials continued to deny that Navalny was poisoned by a nerve agent.

There was no investigative progress on high-profile killings of recent years, including the 2014 death of Timur Kuashev, a journalist critical of Russia'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. Credible nongovernmental organizations 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, and intersex (LGBTQI+) community. For example, in April, two men and one woman disappeared in Grozny after photographs and videos appeared on social media that allegedly showed the individuals having group sex and using drugs. According to independent media, the three individuals were detained by local police, killed, and secretly buried. In 2020, Salman Tepsurkayev, a then age 19 Chechen activist and

moderator of 1ADAT, a social media channel that was highly critical of Kadyrov, was kidnapped and subjected to abuse and humiliation in a disturbing video, reportedly by officers of the Akhmat Kadyrov Post and Patrol Service Regiment of the Chechen Police. In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights found Russia responsible for Tepsurkayev's abduction and torture. In August a lawyer for a prominent human rights group confirmed that Tepsurkayev had been killed and buried in an unmarked grave in 2020.

In December 2021, the European Court of Human Rights found Russia responsible for the abduction and killing of five residents of Chechnya in 2017 who were accused by authorities either of involvement in terrorism or of homosexuality. The court awarded relatives of those killed compensation in the amount of €367,000 (\$392,690).

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 continued to deny there were any such persons in the republic (see section 6).

There were multiple reports that, in some prison colonies and other places of detention, authorities systematically tortured inmates (see section 1.c.), in some cases resulting in death or suicide. For example, no charges were filed nor suspects named in the 2021 death of Yevgeny Ipatov, a Sochi resident who recorded a video just before his death claiming that he was tortured by security forces. According to media reports, forensic experts refrained from ruling whether Ipatov's death on his official death certificate could be considered suicide, murder, or an accident.

There were reports that the government or its proxies committed, or attempted to commit, extrajudicial killings of its opponents in other countries, including numerous such cases in Ukraine (see section 1.g.). There was no investigative progress on prominent extrajudicial killings in other European countries in recent years, including the 2019 killing in Berlin of former Chechen rebel commander Zelimkhan Khangoshvili. In 2021, a German court ruled that Khangoshvili's killing was committed on behalf of government agencies of the Russian Federation. The news website *Caucasian Knot* reported that violent confrontations

with security forces resulted in at least two deaths in the North Caucasus during the first half of the year.

b. Disappearance

There were reports of disappearances perpetrated by or on behalf of government authorities. Enforced disappearances for both political and financial reasons continued in the North Caucasus. According to the August report of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, there were 916 outstanding cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances in the country.

There were reports that police committed enforced disappearances and abductions during the year. For example, in late July, police detained Rizvan Dadayev in Grozny due to his sexual orientation and forced him to confess his sexuality in a video that was published online. As of December, Dadayev's whereabouts remained unknown. Human rights defenders reported that in Chechnya on July 29, two other individuals disappeared whose names were reportedly in Dadayev's contact list.

Security forces were allegedly complicit in the kidnapping and disappearance of individuals from Central Asia, whose forcible return was apparently sought by their governments (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees). For example, in July, Russian citizens Oraz Vazirbekov and Ramzi Vazirbekov, described by independent media as activists in the Pamiri diaspora community in Russia, disappeared in Moscow and appeared a day later in a YouTube video stating they had "voluntarily" returned to Tajikistan to answer authorities' questions regarding events in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast. Several months prior to his disappearance, Oraz Vazirbekov posted a video saying he had information that he was being targeted by Tajik security services for kidnapping or killing.

There were continued reports of abductions and torture in the North Caucasus, including of political activists, LGBTQI+ persons, and others critical of Chechnya head Kadyrov. For example, on January 20, masked men who identified themselves as Chechen law enforcement officers entered the Nizhny Novgorod apartment of Zarema Musayeva, a vocal critic of Kadyrov. They forcibly transferred Musayeva to Chechnya due to an alleged embezzlement case.

Musayeva was later charged with attacking one of the officers. As of December, Musayeva remained in detention. 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 prohibits such practices, numerous credible reports indicated law enforcement officers engaged in torture, abuse, and violence to coerce confessions from suspects, and authorities only occasionally held officials accountable for such actions.

There were reports of deaths because of torture (see section 1.a., above).

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 that police most often used electric shocks, suffocation, and stretching or applying pressure to joints and ligaments because those methods were considered less likely to leave visible marks. The problem was especially acute in the North Caucasus. For example, in March, the European Committee on Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Russia was responsible for the torture in 2010 of former Chechen security officials Alikhan Akhmedov and Aslanbek Daurbekov. According to the Civic Assistance Committee, prisoners in the North Caucasus complained of mistreatment, unreasonable punishment, religious and ethnic harassment, and inadequate provision of medical care.

There were reports that police beat or otherwise abused persons, in some cases resulting in their death. According to the human rights group OVD-Info, security forces used excessive force and harsh tactics to encircle and detain protesters, including minors, during countrywide protests following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24 and again following President Putin's September 21 announcement of a "partial" military mobilization. Human Rights Watch and other NGOs reported that security forces often used excessive force and

other harsh tactics in detaining more than 13,500 persons in the February and March protests against the war and at least 2,000 persons in the September protests against mobilization.

There were reports that law enforcement officers used torture, including sleep deprivation, as a form of punishment against detained opposition and human rights activists, journalists, and critics of government policies. For example, Aleksey Navalny faced increasingly harsh treatment after being transferred to the Penal Colony No. 6 (IK-6) in the Vladimir region in June. According to Navalny, beginning in August, he was repeatedly placed in a punitive solitary confinement cell because of activities his associates continued from abroad and because he established a labor union in his prison to call attention to the exploitation of approximately 600,000 individuals in the country's prisons. In several cities police reportedly subjected members of Jehovah's Witnesses, a religious group banned without basis under antiextremism laws, to physical abuse and torture during and following their arrest. According to Amnesty International, the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses intensified during the year.

There were reports of the FSB using torture against young "anarchists and antifascist activists" who were allegedly involved in several "terrorism" and "extremism" cases.

In the North Caucasus region, there were widespread reports that security forces abused and tortured both alleged militants and civilians in detention facilities. For example, in January, opposition figure Ibragim Yangulbayev spoke to reporters concerning the torture of his family at Ramzan Kadyrov's residence in 2015. According to Yangulbayev, after authorities kidnapped the family and took them to the Kadyrov residence, Kadyrov himself and other officials allegedly tortured them.

There were reports of authorities detaining defendants for psychiatric evaluations to exert pressure on them or sending defendants for psychiatric treatment as punishment. Prosecutors and certified medical professionals may request suspects be placed in psychiatric clinics on an involuntary basis. For example, in January 2021, authorities forcibly hospitalized Siberian shaman Aleksandr Gabyshev after he renewed his 2019 calls to "expel" Vladimir Putin from power and missed a

court-mandated appointment related to his May 2020 detention (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Russia for 2020). In March 2021, the Yakut psychiatric hospital declared Gabyshev insane and in July 2021, the Yakutsk City Court ruled that Gabyshev be confined indefinitely to a psychiatric hospital for compulsory intensive treatment. In August authorities again extended Gabyshev's forced hospitalization. Similarly, on June 1, the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Court approved the forced placement of activist Aleksey Onoshkin in a psychiatric hospital based on a video in which Onoshkin said authorities were driving him to suicide.

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 that 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 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 remained 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 remained a problem, with NGOs reporting approximately 50 percent of prisoners with HIV did not receive adequate treatment. While the law mandates the separation of women and men, juveniles and adults, and pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners in separate quarters, anecdotal evidence indicated not all prison facilities followed these rules. In 2020, Amnesty International reported that prisons' overcrowding, poor ventilation, and inadequate health care and sanitation led to a high risk of COVID-19 infection among prisoners and detainees. According to a 2021 Council of Europe report, the mortality rate of the country's prison population in 2019 increased by more than 12 percent, compared with the previous year.

Physical and sexual abuse by prison guards was systemic. For example, in August, former inmates spoke to the BBC about systemic abuse, including rape and torture, in the country's prisons. Former inmate Aleksey Makarov alleged he was tortured and repeatedly raped while held in the Saratov prison hospital in 2018. This followed the 2021 leaked footage of numerous abuses at the Saratov prison hospital and other facilities throughout the country. Human Rights Watch recorded numerous instances of abuse and torture of anti-war activists throughout the year. For example, activist Artyom Kamardin was beaten and tortured into an "apology" for reciting poetry to protest Russia's war in Ukraine. Prisoner-on-prisoner violence was also a problem. For example, in January, one prisoner died from having his throat slit, presumably by another prisoner, in Angarsk penal colony No. 2. There were reports prison authorities recruited inmates to abuse other inmates.

There were widespread reports that authorities and the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group recruited inmates from Russia's prisons for the country's ongoing war in Ukraine. Civil rights organization Russia Behind Bars estimated that, as of December, approximately 42,000 inmates had already been sent to fight in Ukraine.

There were reports that 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. During the year media coverage of multiple allegations of torture at several penal colonies and testimony from victims and their family members prompted investigations by the Federal Penitentiary System. Valery Balan, the deputy director of the Federal Penitentiary System, was dismissed from his post on May 12 in connection with reports of widespread torture in penal colonies, according to media.

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

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

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 is significantly more difficult.

By law members of oversight commissions have the right to videotape and photograph inmates in detention facilities and prisons with their written approval. Commission members may also collect air samples, conduct other environmental inspections, conduct safety evaluations, and access prison psychiatric facilities. The law permits human rights activists not listed in public oversight commissions

to visit detentions centers and prisons. The NGO Interregional Center for Women's Support, working with detained migrants, noted that only after a specific detainee submits a request and contacts the NGO may the organization obtain permission to visit a given detention center.

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

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

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees: By law authorities may arrest and hold a suspect for up to 48 hours without court approval, provided there is evidence of a crime or a witness; otherwise, an arrest warrant is required. The law requires judicial approval of arrest warrants, searches, seizures, and detentions. Officials generally honored this requirement, although bribery or political pressure sometimes subverted the process of obtaining judicial warrants.

After an arrest, police typically took detainees to the nearest police station, where they informed them of their rights. Police must prepare a protocol stating the grounds for the arrest, and both the detainee and police officer must sign it within three hours of detention. Police must interrogate detainees within the first 24 hours of detention. Prior to interrogation, a detainee has the right to meet with an attorney for two hours. No later than 12 hours after detention, police must notify the prosecutor. They must also give the detainee an opportunity to notify his or her relatives by telephone unless a prosecutor issues a warrant to keep the detention secret. Police are required to release a detainee after 48 hours, subject to bail conditions, unless a court decides, at a hearing, to prolong custody in response to a motion filed by police not less than eight hours before the 48-hour detention period expires. The defendant and his or her attorney must be present at the court hearing,

either in person or through a video link. The law prohibits 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 must complete their investigation and transfer a case to a prosecutor for arraignment within two months of a suspect’s arrest, although an investigative authority may extend a criminal investigation for up to 12 months. Extensions beyond 12 months need the approval of the head federal investigative authority in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, or the Investigative Committee and the approval of the court. According to 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 provides 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 that security services sometimes held detainees in incommunicado detention before officially registering the detention. This practice usually coincided with allegations of the use of torture to coerce confessions before detainees were permitted access to a lawyer. The problem was especially acute in the Republic of Chechnya, where incommunicado detention could reportedly last

for weeks in some cases.

Media reported that police used facial recognition technology to detain several individuals, sometimes days after public demonstrations, with some instances of misidentification leading to the arrest of the wrong individuals. For example, on the June 12 Russia Day holiday, a day on which political opposition and activists have traditionally held antigovernment demonstrations, Moscow police arrested 67 journalists and activists after they were identified using facial recognition technology in Moscow's metro, according to OVD-Info. There were also reports that authorities targeted lawyers involved in the defense of political prisoners. For example, authorities arrested human rights lawyer Dmitry Talantov on June 28 for "spreading false information" regarding the Russian Army. Human rights organizations alleged Talantov was targeted as a result of his defense of journalist Ivan Safronov (see section 2.a.).

Arbitrary Arrest: There were numerous reports of arbitrary arrest or detention, often in connection with demonstrations or single-person pickets, such as those organized after Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine and after Putin's September 21 "partial" military mobilization order. For example, authorities repeatedly arrested prominent human rights activist Oleg Orlov for staging single-person picket protests against Russia's war in Ukraine. 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."

During the year, human rights monitoring groups reported an increase in so-called carousel arrests, in which police immediately re-arrest protest participants upon exiting detention facilities after having completed court-ordered administrative sentences. In contrast to earlier cases of protesters being arrested multiple times, the new charges filed against these activists and journalists stemmed from the same underlying activities or events, allowing authorities to impose lengthy periods of detention for minor infractions. For example, on September 14, opposition politician Leonid Gozman was detained upon leaving a Moscow detention center where he had just completed a 15-day administrative sentence for stating that Stalin was worse than Hitler. Gozman was immediately re-arrested for another 15 days under a law prohibiting comparisons between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

There were reports that 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 may not normally exceed two months, but the court has the power to extend it to six months, as well as to 12 or 18 months if the crime of which the defendant is accused is especially serious. For example, prominent opposition activist Andrey Pivovarov was sentenced on July 15 after being held in pretrial detention since May 2021. Separately, on August 31, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan upheld the decision of the Vakhitovsky Court of Kazan, which had previously extended the detention of activist Andrey Boyarshinov until November 1. Boyarshinov had been detained in March for “calls to terrorism” over his posts on social media against the war in Ukraine. By law a detainee may challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court. Due to problems with judicial independence (see section 1.e.), however, judges typically agreed with the investigator and dismissed defendants’ complaints.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but judges remained subject to influence from the executive branch, the armed forces, and other security forces, particularly in high-profile or politically sensitive cases, as well as to corruption. The outcomes of some trials appeared predetermined. Acquittal rates remained extremely low. In 2020, courts acquitted 0.34 percent of all defendants.

There were reports of pressure on defense attorneys representing clients who were being subjected to politically motivated prosecution and other forms of reprisal. According to a 2019 report from 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 provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but executive interference with the judiciary and judicial corruption undermined this right.

The defendant has a legal presumption of innocence and the right to a fair, timely, and public trial, but these rights were not always respected. The law provides for the appointment of an attorney free of charge if a defendant cannot afford one, although the high cost of legal service meant that lower-income defendants often lacked competent representation. A Yekaterinburg-based legal and human rights NGO indicated many defense attorneys did not vigorously defend their clients and that there were few qualified defense attorneys in remote areas of the country. Defense attorneys may visit their clients in detention, although defense lawyers claimed authorities electronically monitored their conversations and did not always provide them access to their clients.

Non-Russian defendants have 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 is not required to present evidence and is given an opportunity to cross-examine witnesses and call defense witnesses, although judges may deny the defense this opportunity.

The law provides for trial by jury in criminal cases if the defendant is charged with murder, kidnapping, narcotics smuggling, and certain other serious crimes. Nonetheless, trials by jury remained rare, and most verdicts and sentences were rendered by judges. The acquittal rate in trials by jury was higher (23 percent in 2019) than in trials before a judge (0.34 percent in 2020), although acquittals by jury were sometimes overturned by judges in appellate courts.

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

In some cases, judicial authorities imposed sentences disproportionate to the crimes charged. For example, on July 8, a court sentenced Moscow municipal deputy Aleksey Gorinov to seven years in prison for disseminating “knowingly false information about Russia’s armed forces” by criticizing the full-scale

invasion of Ukraine at a municipal council meeting.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

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

As of December 7, the human rights organization Memorial listed 488 political prisoners in the country, including 370 individuals who were allegedly imprisoned wrongfully for exercising freedom of religion or belief. Memorial, which was shut down by the government on April 5, has in the past estimated that the actual number of political prisoners in the country could be three to four times greater than the number on its list. Memorial’s list included opposition activists and politicians, including Aleksey Navalny, Ilya Yashin, and Andrey Pivovarov (see section 1.d.); journalists jailed for their work, such as members of the student publication *DOXA* and *Chernovik* editor Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev (see section 2.a.); human rights activists jailed for their work, 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 jailed for participating in nationwide protests during the year; and members of Jehovah’s Witnesses, certain Muslim groups, and other minority religious groups.

Memorial noted the average length of sentences for the cases on their list continued to increase, from 5.3 years for political prisoners and 6.6 years for religious prisoners in 2016 to 6.8 and 9.1 years, respectively, in 2018. In some cases, sentences were significantly longer, such as the case of Aleksey Pichugin, a former security official of the Russian oil company Yukos, imprisoned since 2003 with a life sentence for conviction of alleged involvement in murder and attempted murder; human rights organizations asserted that his detention was politically motivated to obtain false evidence against Yukos executives.

On April 11, authorities detained prominent opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza outside his Moscow home and charged him the next day with disobeying police orders. On April 22, he was charged with “deliberately spreading false information” about the Russian armed forces for a March 15 speech to the Arizona House of Representatives in which he denounced Russia’s war against Ukraine. Authorities ordered him to be detained pending trial. On August 9, the Basmanny district court ruled to extend Kara-Murza’s pretrial detention until at least October 12. Subsequent to his arrest and detention, authorities charged Kara-Murza with acting on behalf of an organization that the government has designated “undesirable,” the Free Russia Foundation. On October 6, Kara-Murza was further charged with “high treason” on the basis of public remarks he made criticizing Russian authorities. If convicted of all three charges, Kara-Murza faced up to 34 years in prison.

Another prominent opposition politician and former Moscow municipal lawmaker, Ilya Yashin, was arrested on June 27 for disobeying police orders and sentenced to 15 days in jail. The prosecutors subsequently accused Yashin of deliberately spreading false information about the Russian military and ordered him to be detained pending trial. His prosecution for allegedly spreading false information followed several misdemeanor convictions for allegedly “discrediting” the Russian military. On December 9, a Moscow court sentenced Yashin to eight years and six months in prison. Amnesty International and other international NGOs called on authorities to free him immediately because they assess Yashin was punished for his criticism of the war in Ukraine.

On August 24, former Yekaterinburg Mayor and prominent opposition politician Yevgeny Royzman was detained and charged with “discrediting” the Russian armed forces. Royzman attributed his arrest to comments he made “calling Russia’s war in Ukraine an invasion.” He faced up to three years in prison if convicted. A court subsequently ordered Royzman to be released but barred him from public events or communicating with anyone other than his lawyers and close family. Courts convicted Royzman three times during the year on misdemeanor charges of discrediting the military, paving the way for a felony criminal case for such conduct, which the law authorizes for repeat offenses.

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 assassination 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 is 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. For example, on November 12, a Telegram channel with ties to Russia's Wagner Group published a video depicting the extrajudicial killing with a sledgehammer of Yevgeny Nuzhin, a Wagner Group recruit who allegedly surrendered to Ukrainian forces but was subsequently returned to Russia in a prisoner exchange. After the video's release, Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin called Nuzhin a traitor and said, "Do not forget, there are not only traitors who throw away their automatic guns and go over to the enemy. Some...fly away so as not to participate in today's problems."

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: In 2021, authorities detained Yuriy Zhdanov, the father of Navalny associate Ivan Zhdanov, for alleged abuse of office. The Investigative Committee for the Arkhangelsk Region instead charged Zhdanov with the more serious charges of forgery and fraud on a large scale. Zhdanov's pretrial detention was extended and in December 2021 he was given a three-year suspended sentence, which an appeals court converted to a three-year prison term in February. Memorial recognized Zhdanov as a political prisoner.

Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools: There were credible reports that authorities attempted to misuse international law enforcement tools for politically motivated reprisal against specific individuals located outside the country. For example, authorities sought the extradition of Russian citizen Amina Gerikhanova to Russia from Romania on charges of participating in illegal combat

activities in Syria. Gerikhanova was arrested March 13 and her son placed in an orphanage based on an Interpol warrant at the request of Russia, when she attempted to enter Romania from Ukraine, where she lived for five years after fleeing Chechnya. Gerikhanova has since been released from custody, received refugee status in Romania, and removed from the Interpol wanted list.

Additionally, authorities sought the extradition of Russian citizen Aleksey Alchin to Russia from Bulgaria on tax fraud charges. Alchin, who has resided in Bulgaria since 2017, argued the extradition request was political retaliation for his protesting Russia's war in Ukraine and his support for Ukrainian refugees. On August 25, the Bulgarian Court of Appeals overturned a lower court decision approving the extradition.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Although the law provides mechanisms for individuals to file lawsuits against authorities for human rights violations, these mechanisms often were not effective. For example, the law provides that a defendant who has been acquitted after a trial has the right to compensation from the government. While this legal mechanism exists in principle, it was very cumbersome to use. Persons who believed their human rights were violated typically sought redress in the ECHR after domestic courts ruled against them. The ECHR, however, stopped taking Russian cases in September following Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe in March (see section 5). Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe and ECHR jurisdiction was preceded by constitutional amendments in 2020 that established that decisions by international tribunals found by Russia's Constitutional Court to be contrary to the constitution were not enforceable in the country. Many experts interpreted the provision as giving Russian courts greater power to ignore rulings from international human rights bodies, including the ECHR; the courts had already set a precedent by declaring such bodies' decisions "nonexecutable."

Property Seizure and Restitution

The country has 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 addresses the restitution of or compensation for private property; the same is true for heirless property. The

government has laws in place providing for the restitution of cultural property, but according to the laws' provisions, claims may only be made by states and not individuals.

More information about 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/>.

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

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

Law enforcement agencies required telecommunications providers to grant the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB continuous remote access to client databases, including telephone and electronic communications, enabling them to track private communications and monitor internet activity without the provider's knowledge. The law permits authorities with a warrant to monitor telephone calls in real time, but this safeguard was largely pro forma. The Ministry of Information and Communication requires telecommunications service providers to allow the FSB to tap telephones and monitor the internet. A 2021 law allows 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 a missing minor. Prior to the adoption of this law, even though the Ministry of Information and Communication

maintained that authorities would not access information without a court order, the FSB was not required to show it.

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

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

Authorities punished family members for offenses allegedly committed by their relatives. For example, on November 21, the online news outlet *Kavkaz.Realii* reported that in the village of Aldy, Chechen security forces abducted relatives of Movsar Zakriyev, who reportedly killed a traffic police inspector in Grozny and who was subsequently killed by Chechen law enforcement.

According to a 2020 study by 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 April 2021 (see section 1.d.), authorities used facial recognition data to identify protesters, sometimes incorrectly, days after the demonstration.

A 2020 law created a unified federal register containing information on all the country’s residents, including their names, dates and places of birth, and marital status. According to press reports, intelligence and security services would have access to the database in their investigations. There were reports that authorities

threatened to remove children from the custody of parents engaged in political activism or some forms of religious worship, or parents who were LGBTQI+ persons. Several families reportedly left the country due to fear of arrest.

The law requires 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.

g. Conflict-related Abuses

On February 24, approximately eight years after its invasion of Ukraine's Crimea region, Russia launched a 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 hundreds of thousands 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.

Significant human rights issues in the occupied areas included credible reports of egregious cases of: crimes against humanity; war crimes; unlawful and mass killings, including by Russia's forces or Russia-led proxies; enforced disappearances by Russia's forces or Russia-led proxies; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by Russia's forces or Russia-led proxies, including punitive psychiatric incarceration; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and transfer of prisoners to Russia; unjust detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the occupation judiciary; unjust interference with privacy; serious abuses in a conflict, including attacks on civilian infrastructure and cities, resulting in widespread civilian death, torture, or physical abuse; serious restrictions on freedom of expression, including

for members of the media, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and criminal libel laws; 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 vote in free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation, including unelected authorities and elections that were not genuine, free, or fair; serious acts of corruption; serious restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups or Indigenous persons, including Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting LGBTQI+ persons. (For further information about 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 have conducted military operations, including airstrikes, in the conflict in Syria. According to human rights organizations, the country's forces took actions, such as bombing urban areas, that intentionally targeted civilian infrastructure, civilians, and humanitarian workers (see *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Syria).

Since 2017, Russia has 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 recent years, members of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group have also been 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.

Child Soldiers: The U.S. Government has determined that the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group recruited or used child soldiers during the year. Please see the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at 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 provides 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, COVID-19, 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 was widespread, particularly regarding points of view critical of the government or its policies.

Freedom of Expression: On March 5, President Putin signed into effect laws that criminalize independent war reporting and “spreading false information” about Russia’s war in Ukraine, which provides for sentences of up to 15 years in prison. On March 23, the Duma adopted amendments to the laws, effectively expanding the ban on criticizing the armed forces to banning criticism of all government actions. Authorities used the new laws widely and indiscriminately to severely suppress freedom of expression, including by members of the press. Independent rights group OVD-Info reported that following the enactment of new censorship

laws in March, as of December 20, authorities initiated 379 criminal cases for antiwar speech, including charges of spreading “false information” and “discrediting the military.” For example, journalist for the *RusNews* website Maria Ponomarenko was arrested in April for “discrediting” the Russian armed forces with “fake” social media posts. Ponomarenko was held in pretrial detention following her arrest until November 14, when she was placed under house arrest. She faced up to 10 years in prison for a Telegram post concerning the March 16 Russian air strike on a theater in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol that killed hundreds of civilians.

Authorities continued to misuse the country’s expansive definition of extremism, under which citizens may be punished for certain types of peaceful protests, affiliation with certain religious denominations, and even certain social media posts, as a tool to stifle dissent. According to the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, in 2020 authorities “inappropriately initiated” 145 new cases against individuals under antiextremism laws, including for exercising free speech on social media and elsewhere or for their religious beliefs.

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

The law prohibits 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. Amendments adopted in 2020 allow 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 noted that it was adopted during a government public relations campaign against YouTube after it blocked content posted by progovernment media personality Vladimir Solovyov. A 2020 law prohibits 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 collect information in the specified categories could be subject to designation as "foreign agents" (see section 2.b.).

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 2013 law prohibiting the distribution of "propaganda on nontraditional sexual relations" to minors to punish the exercise of free speech by LGBTQI+ persons and their supporters. On November 24, the Duma passed, and on December 5, President Putin signed, a law significantly expanding the scope of the prohibition on such speech (see section 6).

The law bans the display of Nazi symbols and the symbols of groups placed on the government's list of "extremist" organizations. There was no official register or list of banned symbols, although a 2021 law prohibits 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 (see section 2.b.). For example, in July, investigative news outlets *Bellingcat* and *The Insider*, which had previously published multiple exposes on abuses or malfeasance by government officials, were 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 contradicts official narratives. Immediately following the February 24 invasion of Ukraine, the government cracked down on independent media in Russia, closing flagship liberal radio station Ekho Moskvyy and independent daily *Novaya Gazeta*.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists continued to be subjected to arrest, imprisonment, physical attack, harassment, and intimidation as a result of their reporting. For example, on April 7, editor in chief of *Novaya Gazeta* and 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dmitriy Muratov was attacked while on a train from Moscow to Samara. Two attackers threw red paint laced with acetone at Muratov and shouted, “this is for our boys!” while filming the incident. Journalists and bloggers who uncovered government malfeasance or who criticized the government often faced harassment, either in the form of direct threats to their physical safety or threats to their livelihood, frequently through legal prosecution.

There were reports of attacks on journalists by government officials and police and of police detaining journalists to interfere with or punish them for their reporting. For example, Amnesty International reported that *RusNews* journalist Matvey Golovanov was arrested on February 26, while he was live-streaming from a peaceful antiwar rally in Yekaterinburg, despite showing his press credentials. He served a 28-day sentence on charges of repeated violation of the rules of public assemblies.

There were reports of police framing journalists for serious crimes to interfere with

or punish them for their reporting. For example, on September 5, a court sentenced Ivan Safronov, a former national security journalist for major national daily newspapers *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti*, to 22 years in prison for treason and divulging classified information. Safronov was arrested by the FSB in 2020. According to media, Safronov's case itself was classified, and the FSB declined to disclose what information he allegedly shared with Czech intelligence in 2012. Observers speculated the charges might be related to a 2017 *Kommersant* article coauthored by Safronov, detailing the potential sale of Russian military aircraft to Egypt. Safronov also provoked a strong reaction from the government for a 2019 article in *Kommersant* speculating on a shakeup of the leadership in the Federation Council. Safronov's legal team said it would appeal the verdict.

There were reports of police raids on the offices of independent media outlets that observers believed were designed to punish or pressure the outlets. For example, on March 5 in Pskov, riot police broke into the office of local media outlet *Pskovskaya Guberniya*, confiscating computers, mobile phones, and other equipment. The search was conducted under a law on discrediting the Russian Armed Forces that was introduced only one day earlier.

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 (also see Internet Freedom and Academic Freedom and Cultural Events, below).

There were reports that the government retaliated against those who produced or published content it disliked. For example, in April, numerous independent media outlets – including *Mediazona*, *Republic*, *Taiga.Info*, and *Lentachel* – were blocked for their coverage of the war in Ukraine amid broader sweeping martial censorship measures.

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 are permitted to determine what they publish 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. The 29 most-watched stations together commanded 86 percent of television viewership; all were owned at least in part by the federal or local governments or by progovernment individuals. Government-owned media outlets often received preferential benefits, such as rent-free occupancy of government-owned buildings, and a preferential tax rate.

On a regional level, state-owned and progovernment television channels received subsidies from the Ministry of Finance for broadcasting in cities with a population of less than 100,000 and for the creation and production of content. At many government-owned or controlled outlets, the state increasingly dictated editorial policy. While the law restricts foreign ownership of media outlets to no more than 20 percent, another provision of the ambiguously worded law apparently bans foreign ownership entirely. The government used these provisions to consolidate ownership of independent outlets under progovernment oligarchs and to exert pressure on outlets that retained foreign backers.

By law the Ministry of Justice is required to maintain a list of media outlets that are designated "foreign agents." The decision to designate media outlets or individual journalists as foreign agents may be made outside of court by other government bodies, including law enforcement agencies. The law allows authorities to label individuals (both Russian and foreign citizens) as "foreign agents" if they disseminate foreign media to an unspecified number of persons, receive funding from abroad, or, after a 2020 amendment, "carry out the interests of a foreign state." The amendment specifies 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 that 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” are required to register with the Ministry of Justice, and those living abroad also must create and register a legal entity inside the country to publish materials inside the country. All information published by the “foreign agent” individual must be marked as having been produced by a “foreign agent.” Failure to comply with the law may result in heavy fines.

As of December 20, there were 53 outlets and 147 individuals designated as “media foreign agents,” the majority of whom were journalists. Several of those designated as “foreign agents” tried unsuccessfully to reverse their designation.

In 2020, the government imposed new onerous labeling requirements for media outlets designated as foreign agents, which at the time only included Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and its affiliated outlets, and a news site run by Medium-Orient, based in the Czech Republic. In 2021, new amendments introduced fines for the dissemination of information or media content about or belonging to a “foreign agent” without specifying this “foreign agent” status; failure to comply may result in a fine.

During the year authorities vigorously implemented the law to impose fines or noncompliance of labeling requirements. During the year the government further intensified its campaign against “media foreign agents” in the context of its broader crackdown on independent media.

By law authorities were able to close any organization a court determines 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. A 2021 law requires Roskomnadzor to block without a court decision websites that are deemed to justify extremism or terrorism, if the prosecutor general or his deputy submit 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 are criminal offenses. The law prescribes criminal penalties of up to two years’ imprisonment for slander or

libel “using information and telecommunications networks, including the internet.” Authorities continued to use these laws to target human rights defenders and civil society activists in criminal investigations, most recently by accusing them of spreading “fake news” about the war in Ukraine, unreliable information related to the COVID-19 pandemic, or libelously criticizing public officials.

National Security: Authorities cited laws against terrorism or protecting national security to arrest or punish critics of the government or deter criticism of government policies or officials. There were reports that critics of the government’s counterterrorism policies were themselves charged with “justifying terrorism.” In October authorities charged opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza with treason, apparently on the basis of his criticism of Kremlin policies in public remarks.

Internet Freedom

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

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

A 2021 law allows 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 (DNS) for the country, separate from the global DNS, which would allow the country to isolate itself from the global internet, further restricting the free flow of information.

The law requires domestic and foreign businesses to store citizens' personal data on servers physically located in the country. Companies refusing to localize Russian users' data may be fined, with heavier fines or being blocked from operating in the country for repeat offenses. In July, courts fined WhatsApp, Snapchat, Tinder, Spotify, and Hotels.com for refusing to keep data on Russian servers.

Telecommunications companies are required to temporarily retain user data and make it available to law enforcement bodies. Regulatory requirements specify users' voice records must be stored for a period of six months, and electronic correspondence (audio, images, and video) for three months. Observers believed the country's security services were able to intercept and decode encrypted messages on at least some messaging platforms. The law also requires telecommunications companies to provide authorities with "backdoors" around encryption technologies. Companies may be fined if they refuse to provide the FSB with decryption keys that would allow it to read users' correspondence.

A 2021 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 affords authorities leverage to enforce fines and regulations through pressure on domestically located employees. If tech companies do not comply, Roskomnadzor is authorized to block their access to Russian users' personal data. The preliminary list contained 20 companies, including social media networks, instant messenger platforms, search engines and mail services, hosting providers, and online stores.

The government blocked access to content and otherwise censored the internet. Roskomnadzor maintained a federal blacklist of internet sites and required ISPs to block access to web pages that the agency deemed offensive or illegal, including information that was already prohibited, such as items on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The law gives the prosecutor general and Roskomnadzor authority to demand that ISPs block websites that promote extremist information and "mass public events that are conducted in violation of appropriate procedures." A law requiring social media companies to independently block and remove "obscene language" or other prohibited content went into effect in 2021.

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, as of December nearly 640,000 websites were unjustly blocked in the country, and authorities blocked an additional 7,000 websites due to military censorship measures following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Prosecutor General's Office claimed it had removed or blocked more than 130,000 web resources since February 24.

According to Freedom House's 2022 *Freedom on the Net* report, there were approximately 400,000 cases of the government interfering with internet freedom, a significant increase from the previous year. Freedom House noted that criminal prosecutions for violations of unauthorized online activity increased dramatically during the year primarily due to the new law on spreading "false information" about the Russian Armed Forces. Websites, news outlets, and journalists that refuse to comply with government censorship requests face the greatest risk of prosecution. The law requires owners of internet search engines (news aggregators) with more than one million daily users to be accountable for the truthfulness of "publicly important" information before its dissemination. Authorities may demand that content deemed in violation be removed and impose increasingly heavy fines for noncompliance.

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

A 2015 law on the "right to be forgotten" allows individuals in the country to request that search engine companies block search results that contain information about them. According to Freedom House's 2021 *Freedom on the Net* report, the law was "routinely applied to require search engines to delete links to websites that contain personal information about an individual if it is no longer considered relevant." The law fails to limit the "right to be forgotten" when the information requested for removal is in the public interest or concerns 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 (see section 2.a., Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media).

The government prohibited online anonymity. The law requires commercial virtual private network (VPN) services and internet anonymizers to block access to websites and internet content prohibited in the country. The law also authorizes law enforcement agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB, to identify VPN services that do not comply with the ban. By law Roskomnadzor may also block sites that provide instructions on how to circumvent government blocking.

The law prohibits companies registered as “organizers of information dissemination,” including online messaging applications, from allowing anonymous users. Messaging applications and platforms that fail to comply with the requirements to restrict anonymous accounts may be blocked.

There were reports of politically motivated cyberattacks. For example, the *Novaya Gazeta* website was targeted in distributed denial of service attacks throughout the year.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government took further steps during the year to restrict academic freedom and cultural events. In 2021, President Putin signed controversial amendments to the law on education that would potentially subject any educational activity, including informal training sessions, YouTube lectures, and peer-to-peer tutoring, to government regulation and oversight. The amendments also grant the government authority to approve or disapprove all elements of international educational cooperation. The explanatory note that accompanied the draft submitted to the Duma stated that the law’s goal was to protect schoolchildren from “anti-Russian propaganda submitted under the guise of educational activities.” Prominent academics warned that the law would stifle intellectual freedom and creativity. There were reports that the government sanctioned academic personnel for their teachings, writing, research, or political views. Amnesty International noted in a May 12 report that dozens of schoolteachers

faced harsh reprisals for speaking out against Russia's war in Ukraine. Some were forced to serve so-called administrative arrests or paid substantial fines for expressing their opinions either publicly or in the classroom. Others were dismissed or otherwise reprimanded. For example, Roman Melnichenko, associate professor at Volgograd State University, was dismissed on April 19 for an "immoral disciplinary offense" that "violated ethical and moral norms" when he reposted an antiwar message on social media. Melnichenko was dismissed from the university after the local Prosecutor's Office informed the university that he faced administrative proceedings.

There were also reports that the government penalized students for their activism or political views. According to human rights organizations, hundreds of university students were expelled during the year for their political views. For example, on March 9, the Ministry of Internal Affairs reportedly ordered Saint Petersburg State University to expel 13 students who participated in antiwar protests. Additionally, students at many schools and kindergartens have been forced to participate in state-orchestrated, war-themed "flash mobs" or assemblies in support of the "special peacekeeping operation." Universities reported that authorities asked them to take down website pages that indicated cooperation with or announced a program partially funded by the U.S. government.

There were reports that authorities forced the cancellation of concerts by musicians who had been critical of the government or dealt with subjects considered unacceptable to authorities, especially Russia's war against Ukraine. In most cases the FSB or other security forces visited the music venues and "highly recommended" cancellation of the concerts, which the owners and managers understood as a veiled threat against the venue if they did not comply. For example, media reported that authorities cancelled the August 26 concert by popular band Splean because lead singer Aleksandr Vasilyev previously dedicated a song to all artists who fled Russia following the country's invasion of Ukraine.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government severely restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

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

Although they do not require official approval, authorities restricted single-person pickets and required that there be at least 164 feet separating protesters from each other. By law police officers may stop a single-person picket to protect the health and safety of the picketer. The law imposes financial reporting requirements, prohibits protests or public demonstrations near agencies that perform “emergency operational services” (such as law enforcement agencies), and imposes restrictions on journalists covering these events. In addition, the law prohibits “foreign sources of funding” financing public demonstrations and treats single-person pickets, if held in the general vicinity of other picketers, as “mass demonstrations without a permit,” which are banned. Authorities regularly detained single-person picketers.

Peaceful protest activity related to Russia’s war against Ukraine and its associated military mobilization was severely restricted. According to OVD-Info, from February 24 to December 20, authorities conducted at least 19,442 detentions for protest activity opposing the war.

The law requires that “motor rallies” and “tent city” gatherings in public places receive official permission. It requires gatherings that would interfere with pedestrian or vehicle traffic to receive official agreement 10 days prior to the event; those that do not affect traffic require three days’ notice. The law prohibits “mass rioting,” which includes teaching and learning about the organization of and

participation in “mass riots.” The law allows authorities to prohibit nighttime demonstrations and meetings and to levy fines for violating protest regulations and rules on holding public events.

The law imposes a fine for destroying infrastructure facilities and blocking roads and a 10-year prison sentence in the case of death of more than one person.

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

Arrests or detentions for organizing or taking part in unsanctioned protests were common.

Police often broke up protests that were not officially sanctioned, at times using disproportionate force. For example, OVD-Info registered around 5,000 detentions in 69 cities during antiwar protests on March 6, and 34 cases of police brutality. There were reports that 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 provides for freedom of association, but the government did not respect it. Public organizations must register their bylaws and the names of their leaders with the Ministry of Justice. The finances of registered organizations are subject to investigation by tax authorities, and foreign grants must be registered.

The government continued to use the “foreign agents” law, which requires NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in “political activity” to register as

“foreign agents,” to harass, stigmatize, and, in some cases, halt their operation, although fewer organizations were registered than in previous years. On July 14, President Putin signed into law a bill expanding the definition of “foreign agents” to include anyone who is “under foreign influence,” a change that critics said would make it even easier for the state to target its domestic critics. The law entered into force on December 1. Under the legislation, it also became possible for the first time for authorities to designate a for-profit entity as a “foreign agent.” As of December 20, the Ministry of Justice’s registry of organizations designated as “foreign agents” included 228 NGOs. On December 1, the Ministry of Justice combined the several existing “foreign agent” registers into a single unified list with uniform regulatory requirements. NGOs designated as “foreign agents” are banned by law from observing elections and face other restrictions on their activity.

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

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

The law requires that NGOs on the foreign agents list 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. At the same time, the “foreign agent” label did not necessarily exclude organizations from receiving state-sponsored support.

The law requires the Ministry of Justice to maintain a list of “undesirable foreign organizations.” The list expanded during the year to 72 organizations as of December 20.

By law a foreign organization may be found “undesirable” if it is deemed “dangerous to the foundations of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, its national security, and defense.” Authorities did not clarify what specific threats these “undesirable” NGOs posed to the country. Any foreign organization deemed “undesirable” must cease its activities. Any money or assets found by authorities may be seized, and any citizens found guilty of continuing to work with the organization in contravention of the law may face up to seven years in prison. A 2021 law prohibits Russian citizens in any country from taking part in the work of NGOs designated as undesirable in Russia and from transferring money to Russia 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 July 15, opposition activist and former head of the NGO Open Russia Andrey Pivovarov was sentenced to four years in prison for “directing an undesirable organization.” Pivovarov was arrested in 2021 when security forces removed him from a plane in St. Petersburg immediately before takeoff. Memorial considered Pivovarov a political prisoner.

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

In 2021, the Ministry of Justice announced the creation of a further category of “foreign agents” comprising unregistered NGOs or loosely defined “public

associations” that purportedly receive funding from foreign sources and are engaged in political activity in Russia. Under the law, individuals and NGOs who meet the criteria of a “foreign agent” are obliged to register or face criminal liability, with penalties of a fine, compulsory labor for up to 480 hours, or up to two years of correctional labor or prison. Under the law the Ministry of Justice may also assign the “foreign agent” status directly to individuals or associations. In 2021, the election monitoring group Golos became the first association to be included in the list of unregistered public associations.

Authorities continued to misuse the country’s expansive definition of extremism to stifle freedom of association. A 2021 law prohibits members of “extremist” organizations from participating in elections at all levels, municipal, regional, and federal. An organization’s founders and leaders are 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” are barred for three years. In addition to direct membership, a person may be considered by the courts to be “involved” in the organization if that individual makes a statement of support for the group, including on social media, transfers money to it, or offers any other form of “assistance.” The ban may also be applied 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 both “systemic opposition” (effectively progovernment) and independent politicians decried the law as politically motivated and unconstitutional, citing the law’s retroactive nature and ability to disenfranchise thousands of individuals as evident violations of the constitution.

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

There were reports authorities targeted NGOs and activists representing the LGBTQI+ community for retaliation (see section 6).

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 their worship and activities, 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 (see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/ <https://>).

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

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

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

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

Foreign Travel: The law provides for freedom to travel abroad, but the

government restricted this right for certain groups. The law stipulates that a person who violates a court decision does not have a right to leave the country. A court may also prohibit a person from leaving the country for failure to satisfy debts; if the individual is suspected, accused, or convicted of a crime; or if the individual had access to classified material.

The government restricted the foreign travel of millions of its employees, prescribing which countries they are and are not allowed to visit. The restriction applies to employees of agencies including the Prosecutor General's Office, 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 must obtain his written permission. The travel restriction applies to lower-ranking officials, such as heads of agencies, who must obtain permission from their supervisors before travel.

Citizenship: There were reports that the government revoked or sought to revoke citizenship on an arbitrary or discriminatory basis. For example, media reported authorities sought to revoke the citizenship of Arshak Makichyan, a Russian climate activist born in Armenia, due to his public position against Russia's war against Ukraine.

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. The Civic Assistance Committee reported, however, that 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 promotes the organized movement of migrants and refugees.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees.

NGOs reported applicants commonly paid informal “facilitation fees” of approximately 33,000 rubles (\$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 that nearly all newly arrived asylum seekers in large cities, particularly Moscow and St. Petersburg, were forced to apply in other regions, allegedly due to full quotas. NGOs also noted difficulty in applying for asylum due to long queues and lack of clear application procedures. 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 over 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 is not explicitly stated in the law. The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of persons to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The responsible agency, 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 may request access to the agency. Asylum seekers had to rely on the goodwill of border guards and airline personnel to call immigration officials. Otherwise, they faced immediate deportation to neighboring countries or return to their countries of origin, including in some cases to countries where they may have had reasonable grounds to fear persecution.

Human rights groups continued to allege that authorities made improper use of

international agreements that permit them to detain, and possibly repatriate, persons with outstanding arrest warrants from other former Soviet states. This system, enforced by informal ties among senior law enforcement officials of the countries concerned, permitted authorities to detain individuals for up to one month while the Prosecutor General's Office investigated the nature of the warrants. For example, Belarusian human rights activist Yana Pinchuk was extradited to Belarus in August after he was arrested in St. Petersburg in November 2021 at the request of the Lukashenka regime. The Memorial Human Rights Center recognized Pinchuk as a political prisoner.

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

Access to Basic Services: By law successful temporary asylum seekers and persons whose applications were being processed have the right to work, to receive medical care, and to attend school. 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 provides for education for all children, regional authorities occasionally denied access to schools to children of temporary asylum and refugee applicants who lacked residential registration or who did not speak Russian. The Civic Assistance Committee reported that approximately one-third of the children of refugees were enrolled in schools. When parents encountered difficulties enrolling their children in school, authorities generally cooperated with UNHCR to resolve the problem.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. As of October 3, a total of 93,724

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

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Reliable information on whether the government promoted the safe, voluntary, dignified return, resettlement, or local integration of IDPs was not available. According to the independent NGOs Civic Assistance Committee and Memorial, most IDPs in the country were displaced by the Ossetian-Ingush conflict of 1992 and the Chechen wars in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. The Ossetian-Ingush conflict displaced Ingush 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.

g. Stateless Persons

According to the 2010 population census, the country was home to 178,000 self-declared stateless persons. Official statistics did not differentiate between stateless persons and other categories of persons seeking assistance. UNHCR data showed 52,150 stateless persons, including forcibly displaced stateless persons, in the country as of June. Law, policy, and procedures allow stateless persons and their children born in the country to gain nationality. The Civic Assistance Committee noted that most stateless persons in the country were elderly, ill, or single former Soviet Union passport holders who missed the opportunity to claim Russian citizenship after the Soviet Union broke up. The NGO reported various bureaucratic hurdles as obstacles to obtaining legal status in the country. In 2021, President Putin signed a law authorizing temporary identity certificates for stateless persons that would be valid for 10 years or until the holder receives citizenship or a residence permit in another country.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

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

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The September 2021 national elections for the State Duma were neither free nor fair, according to a credible 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.

During the September 9-11 regional elections, pro-Kremlin candidates won all 14

gubernatorial races and maintained large majorities in all regional parliaments and major city councils in which elections were held. Independent monitors alleged massive voting irregularities including harassment of observers, ballot stuffing, and extensive violations of ballot security rules. Critics asserted the government's ongoing repression stymied real political competition. Online voting was especially prone to fraud, observer groups assessed. In Moscow, critics alleged that coercion and bribery were used widely to boost turnout and support for pro-Kremlin candidates. Many analysts pointed to an unusually high number of electronic votes being cast on the first day of voting as evidence that managers were requiring government workers to vote for pro-Kremlin candidates from their workstations.

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 may nominate a presidential candidate without having to collect and submit signatures, prospective self-nominated presidential candidates must collect 300,000 signatures, no more than 7,500 from each region, and submit the signatures to the Central Election Commission for certification. Presidential candidates nominated by parties without State Duma representation must collect 100,000 signatures. An independent presidential candidate is ineligible to run if the commission finds more than 5 percent of signatures invalid.

Significant burdens existed for registering as a candidate in State Duma elections. State Duma candidates may be nominated directly by constituents, political parties in single-mandate districts, political parties on their federal list, or may self-nominate. While any registered political party may run candidates on the party list portion of the ballot, parties that did not overcome the 5 percent threshold during the previous elections must collect 200,000 signatures. Self-nominated candidates must gather the signatures of 3 percent of the voters in their districts.

Observers reported that 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. For example, Anna Cherepanova of the Yabloko Party filed a lawsuit in August alleging that Novgorod Regional Governor Andrey Nikitin and municipal deputies from several parties conspired to prevent her from passing through the municipal filter.

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 Russian armed forces to block dozens of candidates from running for office in the September regional elections or portray them as unpatriotic. For example, a Pskov city court convicted and fined Yabloko Party Chair Lev Shlosberg and his spouse for discrediting the Russian army in April. Yabloko won the 5 percent of votes required to hold a Pskov municipal council seat in the September elections, but media reported that Shlosberg would not occupy it because he was barred from running for office in 2021 due to “involvement in extremist activities” (see section 2.b.).

Systemic opposition parties (i.e., parties that are quasi-independent but generally loyal to the Kremlin, and which are permitted to occupy seats in the Duma) also faced pressure. For example, the social media platform VKontakte blocked the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party (KPRF) on September 11, after the group posted information on election violations. In September, Moscow municipal deputy candidates from the Community Party sued the “Communists of Russia” party for running “doppelganger” candidates with the same names as KPRF candidates.

There were reports government resources were used for campaign purposes. For example, state entities or entities closely aligned with the state also influenced their employees to vote a certain way or in a specific location. During the September elections, intense ongoing repression against civil society organizations limited their ability to monitor and comment on election processes. Authorities restricted speech related to Russia’s war in Ukraine and maintained COVID-19-related restrictions on public gatherings that effectively banned traditional campaign events (see section 2.b.).

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit

participation of women and members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Women's participation remained low, accounting for approximately 15 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 and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides 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 remained a problem. Official corruption continued to be rampant in numerous areas, including education, military conscription, health care, commerce, housing, social welfare, law enforcement, and the judicial system. In January the Ministry of Interior reported a 28 percent increase in the number of bribery crimes in 2021 compared to 2020. There were reports of corruption by government officials at the highest level. In June, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) reported on the network of companies and nonprofits tied to Bank Rossiya holding assets worth at least 245 billion rubles (\$4.5 billion), including the 21,000-square-yard palace near Gelendzhik on the Black Sea coast that the Anticorruption Foundation alleged belongs to President Putin. OCCRP found that close associates of Putin were among the owners of these companies.

Authorities selectively sentenced officials on corruption-related charges. For

example, Deputy Minister of Transport Vladimir Tokarev was arrested in January on corruption charges in connection with a 500 million ruble (\$6.5 million) fraud case.

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

A limited number of domestic and international human rights groups still operating in the country investigated and published their findings on human rights cases despite increasing government restrictions. Government officials were rarely cooperative or responsive to their concerns. Official harassment of independent NGOs continued and, in many instances, intensified, particularly of groups that focused on monitoring elections, engaging in environmental activism, exposing corruption, and addressing human rights abuses.

Some officials, including High Commissioner for Human Rights Tatyana Moskalikova 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 listed as a foreign agent. 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 (HRDs): Authorities continued to use a variety of laws to harass, stigmatize, and in some cases halt the operation of domestic and foreign human rights NGOs (see sections 1.e. and 2.b.). On February 28, the Supreme Court upheld its December 2021 decision to shut down human rights NGO Memorial's two primary organizations, Memorial Human Rights Center and International Memorial, for violating the "foreign agents" law and ostensibly "justifying terrorism and extremism." Russian and international human rights organizations decried Memorial's closure as politically motivated. In April, the Ministry of Justice canceled the registrations of Human Rights Watch,

Amnesty International, the Carnegie Foundation, and 12 other offices of foreign human rights NGOs, citing violations of legislation that Human Rights Watch characterized as “vague.” On December 20, the Ministry of Justice filed a petition with the Moscow City Court to close the Moscow Helsinki Group, Russia’s oldest human rights monitoring group, on the basis of purported violations that international observers widely criticized as a politically motivated bureaucratic pretext.

Authorities used laws passed after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, such as the legislation passed in March criminalizing the discrediting of or publishing “false information” about the Russian Army, to target domestic human rights advocates. In July, authorities initiated a third criminal case against Isabella Yevloyeva, human rights defender and editor in chief of *Fortanga.org*, for publishing “false information” about the Russian military strike that hit the Kremenchuk shopping mall in Ukraine. UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor said the new laws had a “suffocating effect on civil society.”

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The UN General Assembly voted on April 7 to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council due to reports of Russia’s human rights violations in Ukraine. On March 15, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe voted unanimously to recommend Russia’s expulsion. That same day, Russia announced its intention to withdraw from the Council and denounce the European Convention on Human Rights. The ECHR, the international court of the Council of Europe that adjudicates the European Convention on Human Rights, announced it would stop taking cases alleging actions by Russia on September 16. In June, the State Duma adopted two laws that purported to end the ECHR’s jurisdiction in Russia. Amnesty International stated Russia’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.” Following the invocation in July of the OSCE’s Moscow Mechanism, authorities refused to cooperate with the Moscow Mechanism rapporteur tasked with looking into Russia’s fulfillment of the provisions of the OSCE human dimension. 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 is an advisory body to the president tasked with monitoring systemic problems in legislation and individual human rights cases, developing proposals to submit to the president and government, and monitoring their implementation. The president appoints some council members by decree and not all members operated independently. Experts noted that 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: Rape is illegal, and the law provides the same punishment for a relative, including a spouse, who commits rape as for a nonrelative. The penalty for conviction of rape is three to six years' imprisonment for a single offense, with additional time imposed for aggravating factors. According to NGOs, many law enforcement personnel and prosecutors did not consider spousal or acquaintance rape a priority and did not encourage reporting or prosecuting such cases. NGOs reported that local police officers sometimes refused to respond to rape or domestic violence calls unless the 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. There is no domestic violence

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

In December 2021, the ECHR ruled that Russian authorities had violated the European Convention on Human Rights by, among other things, failing to establish a legal framework for combating acts of domestic violence, which women in the country were facing on a “staggering scale,” and holding the perpetrators to account. One of the appellants, Margarita Gracheva, had her hands cut off by her husband after police ignored her complaints of abuse. In September, media reported that Patriarch Kirill and other leaders in the Russian Orthodox Church intervened with President Putin to block domestic violence legislation first introduced in 2019 over concerns the draft law would violate the rights of parents to raise children in accordance with their convictions.

In May the Ministry of Justice added the Tomsk-based NGO Women’s Voice to the foreign agents list in connection with a grant from a Germany-based foundation, media reported. In June, the Tomsk mayor’s office demanded the NGO vacate the premises of its domestic violence shelter, which had been in operation since 2020. Also in June, a Tomsk court fined Women’s Voice President Tatyana Dmitriyeva for “discrediting the Russian army.”

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to exacerbate the challenges of domestic violence. A 2022 study by the Consortium of Women’s Non-Governmental

Organizations found that more than 70 percent of women killed during the COVID-19 pandemic died from domestic violence, a significantly higher proportion than in previous years. Experts said COVID-19-related stay-at-home orders and general restrictions on movement trapped many women experiencing domestic violence in the same space as their abusers.

There were reports that women defending themselves from domestic violence were charged with crimes. In August, a court in Mordovia sentenced a woman to 6.5 years in prison for the murder of her husband; according to the regional prosecutor's office, the husband attacked the woman with a knife, and she snatched the knife from him and stabbed him in the chest. A study by *Mediazona* and *Novaya Gazeta* found that 79 percent of Russian women convicted of premeditated murder in 2016-2018 defended themselves against domestic violence.

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

According to NGOs, police were often unwilling to register complaints of domestic violence, saying that 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 that only 3 percent of such cases eventually reached the courts. Survivors of domestic violence in the North Caucasus experienced difficulty seeking protection from authorities.

NGOs noted government-operated institutions provided services to affected women such as social apartments, hospitals wards, and shelters. Access to these services was often complicated, since they required proof of residency in that municipality, as well as proof of low-income status. In many cases these documents were controlled by the abusers and not available to survivors. Continued COVID-19-related restrictions further limited access to these services.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law does not specifically prohibit FGM/C. NGOs in Dagestan reported that FGM/C was occasionally practiced in some villages. In January a judge in Ingushetiya found a doctor guilty of intentionally harming a minor and fined the doctor 30,000 rubles (\$500) in what media described as the first case of FGM/C to be prosecuted in the country. Lawyers with the Justice Initiative Project called the fine inadequate and called for the doctor to be prosecuted under more serious charges.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence: Human rights groups reported that 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 continued to face 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 prohibits women from living in a house without a man.

Sexual Harassment: The law contains a general provision against compelling a person to perform actions of a sexual character by means of blackmail, threats, or by taking advantage of the survivor's economic or other dependence on the perpetrator. There is no legal definition of harassment, however, and no comprehensive guidelines on how it should be addressed. Sexual harassment was reportedly widespread, but courts often rejected survivors' claims due to lack of sufficient evidence.

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 are no legal restrictions on access to contraceptives, but very few citizens received any kind of sexual education, hampering their use. 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.

According to various human rights groups, COVID-19 restrictions negatively affected accessibility for the full range of reproductive health services.

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 was readily available as part of clinical management of rape in urban centers, but not necessarily in rural areas.

Discrimination: The constitution and law provide that men and women enjoy the same legal status and rights, but women often encountered significant restrictions. Women experienced discrimination in employment and occupation (see section 7.d.), and in access to credit. The law prohibits women from holding 100 jobs deemed to be especially physically taxing, including firefighting, mining, and steam boiler repair.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

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

when they were in order, and demanded bribes.

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

Hate crimes targeting ethnic minorities continued to be 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. In February, the Ministry of Justice added Tuba Kalyk, an NGO focused on assisting members of the Indigenous Tubalar community in the Altai Republic, to its "foreign agent" list after the NGO received a grant from the World Wildlife Fund to monitor illegal logging.

Indigenous Peoples

The constitution and various statutes provide support for members of "small-numbered" Indigenous groups of the North, Siberia, and the Far East, permitting them to create self-governing bodies and allowing them to seek compensation if economic development threatens their lands. The government granted the status of "Indigenous" and its associated benefits only to those ethnic groups numbering fewer than 50,000 and maintaining their traditional way of life. A 2017 report by Antidiscrimination Center Memorial noted that 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 have exclusive rights to their indigenous lands, but the land itself and its natural resources belong to the state. Companies are required to pay compensation to local inhabitants, but activists asserted that local authorities rarely enforced this provision. Activists stated that interests of corporations and Indigenous persons were in constant conflict.

Children

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

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

Child Abuse: The country does not have a law on child abuse, but the law prohibits murder, battery, and rape. The penalties for conviction of such crimes range from five to 15 years in prison and, if they result in the death of a minor, up to 20 years in prison. In January, President Putin signed a law providing a maximum penalty of life in prison for those previously convicted of child molestation, who carried out repeated sexual actions against minors, or for first-time offenders whose crime affected two or more minors or was accompanied by another grievous crime. The law that makes beatings by "close relatives" an administrative rather than a criminal offense for first-time offenders, provided the beating does not cause serious harm requiring hospital treatment, applies to children as well. Some State Duma deputies claimed that children needed discipline and authority in the family, condoning beating as a mode of discipline.

Studies indicated that 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 is 18 for both men and women. Local authorities may authorize marriage from age 16

under certain circumstances. More than a dozen regions allow marriage from age 14 under special circumstances, such as pregnancy or the birth of a child.

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

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

Roskomnadzor has the power to shut down any website immediately and without due process until its owners prove its content does not include child pornography.

Displaced Children: There were reports that Russian forces sent children from Ukraine, many with living parents or guardians, to Russia for “adoption” as part of forced relocation and deportation operations. In May, 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. In September, a senior UN official told the UN Security Council there were credible allegations of forced transfers of unaccompanied children from Russia-occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation or to other territories of Ukraine that Russia occupies. UN officials expressed concern that children were at risk of sexual abuse during Russia’s “filtration” and deportation procedures. At a news conference on October 26, Russian Commissioner for Children’s Rights Maria Lvova-Belova admitted that approximately 2,000 “unaccompanied children” from Ukraine had been “evacuated” to Russia, mainly to orphanages and other group homes, while “350 orphans from Donbas have already been placed in foster families in 16 regions of Russia, but a thousand more children are waiting for new parents.”

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

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 the most recent data available, the RJC reported a slight decline in the level of antisemitic violence in 2020 compared with previous years. In February, the Sova Center reported three attacks on Jewish sites, the same number reported in 2020. During the year, the Sova Center reported incidents of vandalism targeting Jewish sites, including the tombstone of Musar Movement founder Israel Salanter in Kaliningrad. In July media reported that some Jews were fleeing the country in the wake of the February 24 invasion of Ukraine and feared rising antisemitism linked to President Putin's stated aim to "de-Nazify" Ukraine. The *Jerusalem Post* reported more than 20,000 Russians immigrated to Israel between January and July, citing Israeli government statistics. In a May 1 media interview, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed the question of how Russia could claim it is fighting to "de-Nazify" Ukraine when some Ukrainian leaders, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, are Jewish, arguing "Hitler had Jewish blood" and "the most ardent antisemites are usually Jews." Jewish organizations condemned Lavrov's remarks as antisemitic and President Putin later apologized to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett over Lavrov's remarks, media reported. In June Chief Rabbi of Moscow Pinchas Goldschmidt left Russia after authorities demanded he publicly support the war in Ukraine. In July, the Ministry of Justice sought to close the Jewish Agency for Israel, a nonprofit organization that assists with immigration to Israel, over alleged irregularities. Authorities accused the organization of encouraging "brain drain" from Russia by helping highly skilled

workers emigrate, media reported.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at 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: While the law does not criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, authorities used seemingly neutral laws on protecting minors to justify the arbitrary arrest of LGBTQI+ persons. In August, the St. Petersburg-based LGBTQI+ rights organization Coming Out reported a same-sex couple from Moscow were arrested and charged with violent acts of a sexual nature against persons under age 14 for allegedly having sex in their apartment by an open window and in view of minors. The couple denied the allegation. If convicted, they faced a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: During the year there were reports state actors committed violence against LGBTQI+ individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, particularly in Chechnya (see section 1.b.). There were reports that government agents attacked, harassed, and threatened LGBTQI+ activists. For example, in February, the Achkhoy-Martan District Court in Chechnya sentenced brothers Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isayev to eight and six years in prison, respectively, for aiding illegal armed groups. Amnesty International stated the brothers were falsely accused and targeted for belonging to the LGBTQI+ community and moderating a Telegram channel critical of Chechen authorities. In February 2021, Chechen police abducted Magamadov and Isayev from Nizhny Novgorod and forcibly returned them to a detention center in Grozny. In 2020, an NGO, the Russian LGBT Network, had helped Magamadov and Isayev flee Chechnya to Nizhny Novgorod after the two were arbitrarily detained and tortured, Amnesty reported.

There were instances of nonstate actor violence targeting LGBTQI+ persons and

police often failed to respond adequately to such incidents. Activists reported an increase in hostility online and in real life toward LGBTQI+ persons after the State Duma introduced legislation in October expanding the ban on “propaganda” of “nontraditional sexual relations.” One St. Petersburg-based activist told media that young nationalists attacked members of a local LGBTQI+ organization during a meeting in a public park. The organization had been prevented from holding the meeting in a community center, the activist said.

A 2020 report from the Russian LGBT Network showed 12 percent of LGBTQI+ respondents in a survey experienced physical violence, 4 percent experienced sexual violence, and 56 percent experienced psychological abuse during their lifetime. The report also noted that transgender persons were uniquely vulnerable to violence. The Russian LGBT Network claimed that 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 does 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 that LGBTQI+ individuals seeking health care often encountered strong negative reactions and the presumption they were mentally ill. In May, the NGO Coming Out published a survey of LGBTQI+ persons in St. Petersburg showing 20 percent of respondents encountered workplace discrimination and 27.2 percent said they faced discrimination in medical services. There were reports LGBTQI+ persons faced discrimination in parental rights.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: While the law provides for legal gender recognition, LGBTQI+ rights organizations reported transgender persons faced difficulty updating their names and gender markers on government documents to reflect their gender identity. To amend the birth record, the law requires the submission of a fixed-form certificate on gender change issued by a medical institution. Activists reported, however, the Ministry of Health has never issued the fixed-form certificate despite being ordered to do so in 1998. In absence of a standardized form, activists reported many civil registry offices denied requests to amend the birth record. Activists also reported that civil registry authorities and courts in most cases require transgender persons to undergo gender reassignment surgeries or provide proof of other medical interventions, in addition to a diagnosis of “transsexualism.” When documents failed to reflect their gender identity, transgender persons often faced harassment by law enforcement officers and discrimination in accessing health care, education, housing, transportation, and employment.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: There were reports of LGBTQI+ persons being targeted for involuntary “conversion therapy.” In July, Dagestan resident Magomed Askhabov demanded a criminal case be opened against the Start Rehabilitation Center in Khasavyurt, where Askhabov alleged he and other center residents were physically abused and subjected to forced prayer as part of their “treatment” for homosexuality. There were reports police conducted involuntary physical exams of transgender or intersex persons. The Association of Russian-speaking Intersex reported that medical specialists often pressured intersex persons (or their parents if they were underage) into having so-called normalization surgery without providing accurate information about the procedure or what being intersex meant.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: On December 5, President Putin signed into law amendments that broadened the law criminalizing the distribution of “propaganda” of “nontraditional sexual relations” to minors, which effectively limits the rights of free expression and assembly for citizens who wish to advocate publicly for LGBTQI+ rights or express the opinion that homosexuality is normal (see section 2.a.). The new law

completely bans such “propaganda” among persons of all ages through the media, the internet, advertising, literature, and cinema. The law also bans the sale of goods containing “prohibited information” and gives Roskomnadzor the authority to monitor and block entities that distribute “prohibited information.” Under the new law, individuals face significant administrative fines for “LGBT propaganda” or “demonstrations of LGBT and information that encourages a change of gender among teenagers.” These fines can be significantly greater for legal entities.

On December 13, media reported that Sergey Troshin, a St. Petersburg municipal deputy and Yabloko party member, was referred to prosecutors under the new law. In July, Troshin publicly came out as gay to, among other things, call attention to rising homophobia and support the LGBTQI+ community in the country. In July, the Central District Court of Komsomolsk-on-Amur acquitted LGBTQI+ rights defender Yuliya Tsvetkova on the criminal offense of disseminating pornography online after she shared images depicting women’s bodies on her social media accounts. Tsvetkova was held under house arrest for three years. On November 22, an appeals court upheld Tsvetkova’s acquittal. The Ministry of Justice added Tsvetkova to its list of “foreign agents” in June. In January, authorities charged Anna Plusinin, the director of the LGBT Resource Center in Yekaterinburg, with promoting “nontraditional relations.” Also in January, police came to the Moscow Community Center for LGBT Initiatives demanding the group cancel its planned “Open Art” festival. Center Director Tatyana Vinnichenko told *Novaya Gazeta* that the center refused and the event proceeded as planned.

Authorities used the law on propaganda of “nontraditional sexual relations” and other laws, such as the foreign agent law, to pressure LGBTQI+ rights organizations. In April, a St. Petersburg court ordered the closure of the Sphere Foundation following a Ministry of Justice lawsuit alleging the foundation “denies traditional sexual relations.” The Sphere Foundation operated the Russian LGBT Network, one of the country’s most prominent LGBTQI+ organizations. The entire staff of the LGBTQI+ rights organization Coming Out left the country in April; a spokesperson told *Novaya Gazeta* that increased repression following Russia’s February 24 invasion of Ukraine made it impossible to continue working from Russia. In January, Russian LGBT Network cofounder Igor Kochetkov left the country after being designated a “foreign agent.”

Persons with Disabilities

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

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

Persons with disabilities faced discrimination in employment and occupation (see section 7.d.).

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

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

The government began to implement inclusive education, but many children with disabilities continued not to study in mainstream schools due to a lack of accommodations to facilitate their individual learning needs. Many schools did not have the physical infrastructure or adequately trained staff to meet the needs of children with disabilities, leaving them no choice but to stay at home or attend segregated schools. Even when children were allowed to attend a mainstream school, many staff and children lacked understanding to meet the educational

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

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

In many cases persons with intellectual or physical disabilities were confined to institutions where they were often subjected to abuse and neglect.

Roszdraznadzor, the Federal Service for Surveillance in Health Care, announced that it found abuses in 87 percent of institutions for children and adults with intellectual disabilities during a 2019 audit.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Persons living with HIV faced significant legal discrimination, social stigma, barriers to accessing health care, and employment discrimination. The law allows individuals with HIV to adopt children only if they meet strict criteria, but in many cases they continued to face barriers to adopting. According to NGO activists, men who have sex with men were unlikely to get tested and seek antiretroviral treatment due to stigma and fear of exposure, while sex workers avoided testing and treatment due to threats from law enforcement. Many individuals who inject drugs also 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

in accessing reproductive health care. By law, foreign citizens who are HIV-positive may be deported but the law bars deportation if the individual has a Russian national or permanent resident spouse, child, or parents. Economic migrants concealed their HIV status and avoided treatment for 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 continued to designate HIV-related NGOs as foreign agents, limiting their services to the community (see section 2.b.). In February, the charitable foundation Humanitarian Action in St. Petersburg was forced to stop its HIV-related outreach to transgender persons due to threats of violence.

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 provides that workers may form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination, but it does not require employers to reinstate workers fired due to their union activity. The law prohibits reprisals against striking workers. Unions must register with the Federal Registration Service, often a cumbersome process that includes lengthy delays and convoluted bureaucracy. The grounds on which trade union registration may be denied are not defined and can be arbitrary or unjustified. The law requires labor unions to be independent of government bodies, employers, political parties, and NGOs. Authorities have used “foreign agent” designations to impede the activity of independent trade unions.

The law places several restrictions on the right to bargain collectively. For example, only one collective bargaining agreement is permitted per enterprise, and only a union or group of unions representing at least one-half the workforce may bargain collectively. The law allows workers to elect representatives if there is no

union, but the law does not specify who has authority to bargain collectively when there is no trade union in an enterprise. The government has absolute discretion in determining whether a union has 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 are excluded from the right to organize.

The right to strike is enshrined in the constitution, but the law restricts this right in practice. Advanced notification requirements, excessive formalities and requirements make 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 prohibits strikes in the military and emergency response services. It also prohibits strikes in essential public-service sectors, including utilities and transportation, and strikes that would threaten the country's defense, safety, and the life and health of its workers. The law additionally prohibits nonessential public servants and workers from a broad range of industries defined as essential from striking. The law imposes compulsory arbitration for railroad, postal, and municipal workers, as well as public servants in roles other than law enforcement.

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

The Federal Labor and Employment Service (RosTrud) regulates employer

compliance with labor law and is responsible for “controlling and supervising compliance with labor laws and other legal acts which deal with labor norms” by employers. Several state agencies, including the Ministry of Justice, Prosecutor’s Office, RosTrud, and Ministry of Internal Affairs, are 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.

In April, Kirill Ukraintsev was arrested and subsequently charged with participating in unauthorized gatherings for organizing courier and taxi driver strikes. He faced a sentence of up to five years in prison if convicted. Human rights advocates with Memorial considered Ukraintsev a political prisoner and argued the criminal case against him was aimed at intimidating striking workers.

In August, a Moscow court fined the Russian Journalists’ and Media Workers’ Union (JMWU) 500,000 rubles (\$8,300) for “discrediting” the Russian army. The court is also considering a July request from the Moscow prosecutor’s office to close the JMWU, following a month-long inspection of the union’s compliance with trade association legislation. On February 24, the JMWU issued a statement demanding an immediate end to the military operation in Ukraine.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Compulsory prison labor occurred, which in some cases was used as punishment for expressing political or ideological views. In 2020, the International Labor Organization (ILO) expressed concern that the law on defamation was so broad and general that it could lead to the imposition of compulsory labor as a means of

political coercion or punishment for the expression of political or ideological views, in a manner inconsistent with the country's obligations under ILO conventions on forced and compulsory labor. Human rights groups expressed concern regarding the prison system being used in the construction sector in remote regions, due to insufficient numbers of Central Asian migrant workers. Instances of labor trafficking were reported in the construction, manufacturing, logging, textile, and maritime industries, as well as in sawmills, agriculture, sheep farms, grocery and retail stores, restaurants, waste sorting, street sweeping, domestic service, and forced begging.

Serious problems remained in protecting migrant laborers, particularly from North Korea, who generally earned 40 percent less than the average salary. Migrant workers at times experienced exploitative labor conditions characteristic of trafficking cases, such as withholding of identity documents, nonpayment for services rendered, physical abuse, unsafe working conditions, and extremely poor living conditions.

Under a state-to-state agreement, North Korean citizens worked for many years in the country in a variety of sectors, including the logging and construction industries in the Far East. To comply with the 2017 UN Security Council resolution prohibiting the employment of North Koreans, Russia had largely eliminated from the workforce North Korean laborers working in the country legally and continued to affirm its commitment to do so. Many North Korean laborers, however, continued to enter the country via fraudulent channels to work informally, for example by obtaining tourist or student visas. Authorities failed to screen departing North Korean workers for indications of human trafficking, including forced labor.

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

The government did not effectively enforce laws against forced labor.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at

www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in respect to employment and occupation based on race, religion, national origin, color, sex, ethnicity, age, and refugee status, but does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, HIV status, gender identity, or disability. Although the country placed a general ban on discrimination, the government did not effectively enforce the law, and penalties for violations were less than those for other civil rights-related laws. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Discrimination based on gender in compensation, professional training, hiring, and dismissal was common, but very difficult to prove. Employers often preferred to hire men to save on maternity and child care costs and to avoid the perceived unreliability associated with women with small children. The law prohibits employer discrimination in posting job vacancy information. It also prohibits employers from requesting workers with specific gender, race, nationality, address registration, age, and other factors unrelated to personal skills and competencies. Notwithstanding the law, vacancy announcements sometimes specified gender and age requirements or a desired physical appearance.

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

Women are restricted from employment in certain occupations in the chemical industry, metallurgy, oil production, coal mining, manufacturing of insulation, and some others owing to the harmful effects of certain compounds on women's reproductive health. In 2021, the law was amended to reduce the number of labor categories prohibited to woman from 456 to 98. The Ministry of Labor estimated the gender wage gap at 29 percent in 2021. The legal age requirements for women

and men to access either their full or partial pension benefits are not equal.

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

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

Many migrants regularly faced discrimination and hazardous or exploitative working conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic more severely impacted migrant workers. Employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was a problem, especially in the public sector and education. Employers fired LGBTQI+ persons for their sexual orientation, gender identity, or public activism in support of LGBTQI+ rights. Primary and secondary school teachers were often the targets of such pressure due to the law on “propaganda of nontraditional sexual orientation” targeted at minors (see section 6).

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

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wages and Hour Laws: The law provides 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.

Nonpayment of wages is a criminal offense and is punishable by fines, compulsory labor, or imprisonment. Federal law provides for administrative fines of employers who fail to pay salaries and sets progressive compensation scales for workers affected by wage arrears. Penalties for nonpayment of wages were commensurate with penalties for similar crimes, such as fraud. Penalties were rarely applied against violators and nonpayment or late payment of wages remained widespread.

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

The law stipulates that payment for overtime must be at least 150 percent for the first two hours and not less than 200 percent after that. At an employee's request, overtime may be compensated by additional holiday leave. Overtime work may not exceed four hours in a two-day period or 120 hours in a year for each employee.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate within the main industries. The law establishes minimum conditions for workplace safety and worker health, but it does not explicitly allow workers to remove themselves from hazardous workplaces without threat to their employment. The law entitles foreigners working in the country to the same rights and protections as citizens. No national-level statistics were available on workplace accidents or fatalities during the year. Rosstat reported 21,600 workers were injured in industrial accidents in 2021, including 1,210 deaths.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: RosTrud is responsible for enforcing wage, hour, 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 are criminal offenses. Penalties for wage, hour, and OSH violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions, although there were significant restrictions on inspectors' authority to inspect workplaces. In April, RosTrud announced a moratorium on scheduled inspections until the end of the year, as part of a set of measures introduced by the government in March to support business in the face of sanctions. RosTrud said it would continue the "necessary inspector response" to protect the life and health of workers.

Experts pointed to prevention of these offenses, rather than adequacy of available punishment, as the main challenge to protection of worker rights. RosTrud noted 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 cancel decisions and penalties imposed by labor inspectors.

Informal Sector: Rosstat estimated that 20.3 percent of the workforce or approximately 15.3 million persons were informally employed in 2021. Employment in the informal sector was concentrated in the southern regions. The largest share of laborers in the informal economy was concentrated in the trade, construction, and agricultural sectors, where workers were more vulnerable to exploitative working conditions. Labor migrants worked in low-skilled jobs in construction but also in housing, utilities, agriculture, and retail trade sectors. Labor law and protections apply to workers in the informal sector but are rarely enforced.