



Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken

Thematic Country of Origin Information
Report on the Russian Federation
Military service; LGBTIQ+; critics and opponents

Date 14 February 2025

Publication details

Version number 1.0



This translation has been co-funded by the European Union.

The Dutch version of this report is leading. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands cannot be held accountable for misinterpretations based on the English version of the report.

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Introduction

This Thematic Country of Origin Information Report (COI Report) was drawn up on the basis of the questions asked and points for attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) compiled by the Ministry of Justice and Security. The ToR for this Country of Origin Information Report were adopted on 19 September 2024.

This COI Report describes the situation in Russia in terms of military service, LGBTIQ+ people and critics and opponents, insofar as this affects the assessment of asylum applications from individuals originating from this country, and for decision-making regarding the return of rejected Russian asylum seekers. This COI Report is an update of the General Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation dated March 2023¹ in terms of the topics described here. The reporting period covers the period from March 2023 through January 2025. This COI Report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document, nor does it reflect the government's vision or policy in relation to any given country or region, or reach any conclusions on immigration policy.

This COI Report has been compiled on the basis of both public and confidential sources, using carefully selected, analysed and verified information. Use was made of information from various sources, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), reports of European and other COI² organisations, specialist literature, media reporting and (if applicable) relevant government agencies. The content in this COI Report is based on multiple sources, except where the facts are generally undisputed or when stated otherwise. The public sources that were consulted are listed in the appendices of this COI Report.

The report also draws on information obtained through the diplomatic mission of the Netherlands in Russia. Some of the information used was obtained through interviews with relevant and expert sources. The information gleaned from confidential interviews was used mainly to support and augment passages founded on publicly available information. The confidential sources are marked as such in the footnotes and accompanied by a date. Where possible, information obtained from a confidential source is supported by information from another source.

Chapter 1 covers military service, including conscription service, military contracts and mobilisation. Chapter 2 addresses LGBTIQ+ people, and Chapter 3 concerns the position of critics and opponents.

¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#), March 2023.

² Country of Origin Information

1 Military service

This chapter addresses various groups of soldiers: conscripts, contract soldiers and reservists. Conscripts are all Russian men aged between 18 and 30 of age who have not yet completed their conscription (compulsory national service) (see [1.1](#)). Contract soldiers are people who have signed a contract with the Russian army, including professional soldiers (see [1.2](#)). Reservists are the men and women who could be mobilised during the mobilisation of September and October 2022 (see [1.3](#)). Penalties applicable to all three categories are explained in [1.4](#).

In relation to the war in Ukraine, the Russian government also exercised great restraint in sharing information during this reporting period. For example, Russian authorities provided hardly any information on the number of soldiers killed. Relatives of soldiers reported having received misleading or inaccurate information about their relatives. Ambiguity also prevailed with regard to the number of cases of desertion or refusal, as most court decisions and statistics were no longer published.³ Wherever numbers are incorrect or represent a minimum, this is clearly indicated in the text.

1.1 Conscripts

During the reporting period, Russia had compulsory military service (conscription) for all men between the ages of 18 and 30 years. This compulsory national service lasts for twelve months, and conscripts can transfer to contract military service during this period. Men subject to conscription have been called up for military service both in Russia and, since 2024, in the temporarily occupied and illegally annexed territories of Ukraine: Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Cherson and Crimea.⁴ This involved men with Russian passports, as far as is known. Russian occupation authorities exerted great pressure on residents of the temporarily occupied territories to adopt Russian nationality.⁵

Additional background information on conscription is available in the 2023 General COI Report on the Russian Federation.⁶

This chapter describes measures taken during the reporting period that have made it more difficult to evade conscription. Examples include an increase in the conscription age ([1.1.1](#)), the introduction of the electronic conscription register ([1.1.2](#)), the imminent introduction of a digital summons ([1.1.3](#)) and an increase in the statutory fines and other measures in the event of failure to comply with a summons ([1.1.3.2](#)).

1.1.1 Increasing the conscription age

³ Freedom House, Freedom World [Russia](#), 2023.

⁴ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 25.

⁵ OFPRA, [Ukraine: Russian military recruitment in the occupied territories](#), 17 May 2024, p. 6; OCHCR, [Report on human rights situation in Ukraine](#), pp. 18 and 24;

⁶ See Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#), March 2023.

With effect from 1 January 2024, the upper conscription age was raised from 27 to 30 years.⁷ Beginning with the spring 2024 round of summonses for compulsory military service, all men who had reached the age of 27 years on or after 1 January 2024 fell within the conscription age bracket. In contrast, men who had already reached the age of 27 years before 1 January 2024 were not subject to compulsory military service. These men would automatically become part of the military reserve, as would men who were already 28 and 29 years of age.⁸ It is not known whether military recruitment offices actually exempted men between the ages of 27 and 29 years, who were exempt from compulsory national service. Media reported that, in March 2023, a military recruitment office denied a military booklet to a 27-year-old, ahead of the January 2024 law change. He was not placed in the reserve, and he was therefore subject to compulsory military service.⁹

Men whose cause for suspension of compulsory military service expired on or after 1 January 2024, and who had reached the age of 27 years after that date were subject to compulsory military service.¹⁰

1.1.2 *Electronic military register (Uniform Military Register)*

A digital register regarding the military status of individuals has been under development for some time. During the reporting period, the introduction of such a register was still in a testing phase.

In late April 2024, the Russian government announced the introduction of the 'Uniform Military Register of information on civilians subject to initial military registration, civilians listed in the military register and civilians not listed in the military register but required to be listed in the military register'¹¹ (hereinafter, the Uniform Military Register). This Uniform Military Register must contain all information on military registration and on civilians subject to it – including personal and passport details, contact details, SNILS¹², TIN¹³, information on citizenship, education, employment, marital status and number of children, and medical data. To this end, personal data of conscripts and reservists should be combined with

⁷ The Guardian, *Russia raises the maximum age of conscription as it seeks to replenish Ukraine forces*, 26 July 2023; Euronews, [Russia's autumn conscription: How many of the 133,000 draftees will end up in Ukraine?](#), 1 October 2024; Le Monde, [Russia raises conscription age from 27 to 30](#), 29 July 2023.

⁸ ISW, Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 31 March 2024; TASS, Vladimir Putin signed a decree on the spring conscription of Russian citizens for military service, 31 March 2024 (https://t.me/tass_agency/240884?single); Vedomosti, [The state Duma adopted a law raising the conscription age to 30](#), 25 July 2024 (RU); Meduza, [More than a million more soldiers](#), 27 July 2024; ISW, *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment*, 31 March 2024; Wet [312507-8](#) dated 25 July 2023; The New York Times, [Russia Moves to Expand Conscription](#), 25 January 2023, updated 7 January 2023; confidential source dated 29 November 2024.

⁹ Aktivata, [The military registration and enlistment office did not issue a military ID to a 27-year-old man](#), 14 March 2023 (RU).

¹⁰ Confidential source dated 29 November 2024. For example, this was the case for men who had been granted deferments on the grounds of study, temporary illness or caring for a minor sibling who had come of age. For information on reasons for delay, see also Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#), March 2023, p. 42.

¹¹ Russian: *Единый реестр сведений о гражданах, подлежащих первоначальной постановке на воинский учет, гражданах состоящих на воинском учете, а также о гражданах, не состоящих, но обязанных состоять на воинском учете*. In English, the register is designated as the 'Unified Register of Military Registration'. The term *uniform* clearly indicates that information from multiple databases is brought together in this register.

¹² The Russian social security number.

¹³ The Russian tax number.

information from other systems, including tax authorities, enforcement agencies, educational institutions, the Russian pension fund, medical institutions, the employer and *Gosuslugi* (a government portal for public services).¹⁴ The future linking of the aforementioned data to information from training institutions and employers¹⁵ in the Uniform Military Register will make it possible for the military recruitment office to know where conscripts and reservists are actually located, if this is elsewhere than the registered address.¹⁶ At present, authorities are aware only of the actual whereabouts of persons on the wanted list.¹⁷ Not everyone knows whether he is on the wanted list. The independent news platform Mediazona has published a wanted list, albeit non-exhaustive.¹⁸ The army sometimes transmits electronic messages containing the names of wanted deserters.¹⁹ It is not clear whether this happens systematically.

In addition to the Ministry of Defence, the Federal Security Service FSB and other intelligence agencies will also have access to the register. Conscripts themselves will be able to see the notification of the summons in *Gosuslugi*, the portal for government services.²⁰ Users will receive email notification from a post in *Gosuslugi*. They can register with *Gosuslugi* through Two-Factor Authentication (2FA).²¹ Conscripts can login online to access *Gosuslugi*, as well as the actual Uniform Military Register using the login details for *Gosuslugi*.²² It is not known whether the Uniform Military Register also allows conscripts to see whether they are put on a wanted list.

The Uniform Military Register was supposed to be operational from 1 November 2024.²³ The launch was nevertheless postponed to January 2025. According to media reports, the reason was the lack of willingness of different government departments to share data with each other. In addition, there were said to be major technical problems in linking different systems, as personal data had purportedly been entered inconsistently, at least in part.²⁴ Also, the online environment has

¹⁴ Kommersant, [Digital register of military personnel takes shape](#), 5 October 2023 (RU); Open Democracy, [Russia plans crackdown on men avoiding the draft](#), 11 April 2023; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU).

¹⁵ Employers are required to provide data on employees to military registration and recruitment offices. See also Kommersant, [Employers are being added to the military register](#), 4 July 2024.

¹⁶ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU).

¹⁷ Mediazona, [Torture, Bribes, and an escape](#), 11 December 2024.

¹⁸ Mediazona, [Russia's wanted list. An updated and user-friendly database](#), 26 November 2024.

¹⁹ The New York Times, [How to Escape From the Russian Army](#), 27 June 2024.

²⁰ RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU);

²¹ In November 2024, Gmail users were asked to register with *Gosuslugi* using a different email address. See Meduza, [Russia's government services portal has asked people to stop using Gmail](#), 1 November 2024. People without an account on *Gosuslugi* are regarded as having received the summons after 7 days. For a more detailed explanation of *Gosuslugi*, see: RAAM, [From digital Paradise to digital Gulag](#), 17 April 2023.

²² RFERL, [Vulnerability Found in Electronic Subpoena Registry](#), 19 September 2024 (RU).

²³ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Klein, M., [Wie Russland für einen langen Krieg rekrutiert](#), SWP Comment, No. 24, 27 June 2024.

²⁴ Carnegie Endowment, [Russia's Database of Draft Dodgers Will Only Cause More Chaos](#), 3 May 2023; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU); confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

apparently not yet been properly secured.²⁵ The system has already been tested in three Russian regions: the Ryazan and Sakhalin regions, and the Autonomous Republic of Mari El.²⁶

1.1.3 *Digital summons and raids*

Since April 2023, there has been no legal requirement for a summons for military service to be handed over in person. Unlike before, the summons can be issued digitally through *Gosuslugi*, and through the Uniform Military Register, once it is in place. In addition, it is still possible for the summons to be served by registered letter and in person.²⁷ Given that the Uniform Military Register had not yet been introduced in the autumn round of conscript recruitment in 2024, summonses for compulsory national service were sent digitally in only three pilot regions – Ryazan and Sakhalin, and the Autonomous Republic of Mari El. These summonses were purely of informational value, and they were not legally binding. There could therefore be no legal consequences for ignoring a digital summons.²⁸ To be legally binding, in all regions – including the pilot regions – pending the electronic Uniform Military Register, summonses still had to be served in the old way,, meaning they had to be served personally and signed by the conscript, or delivered to the conscript by registered mail.²⁹ It is not known whether this was actually done in the pilot regions.

Under the new system – which had not yet been introduced during the reporting period – in principle, it is no longer possible to avoid the serving of a summons, and thus the legal obligation to appear at the recruitment office. The summons is regarded as having been served after it has been sent to the conscript through the Uniform Military Register, and not only once the conscript has actually opened the summons.³⁰ Until the introduction of the Uniform Military Register, conscripts were not called up in a legal sense until they had actually been handed a summons in person, and it was therefore only from that point onwards that they were also subject to a penalty for evading military service. In the past, ignoring a summons for compulsory national service had been difficult to sanction, as conscripts would often evade summonses (for example, by staying at another address).³¹ The electronic register is expected to make the evasion of military service impossible.

²⁵ Novaya Gazeta, [Serious vulnerability discovered on Russia's electronic summons website](#), 18 September 2024 (RU); RFERL, [Vulnerability Found in Electronic Subpoena Registry](#), 19 September 2024 (RU).

²⁶ The Moscow Times, [Russia Delays Launch of Digital Military Summons Until 2025, Lawmaker Says](#), 23 September 2024.

²⁷ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Klein, M., [Wie Russland für einen langen Krieg rekrutiert](#), SWP Comment, No. 24, 27 June 2024; Kommersant, [The government has approved the possibility of registering for military service without personally appearing at the military registration and enlistment office](#), 28 July 2023.

²⁸ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 23; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU); Novaya Gazeta Europe, [What to do if you get an email?](#), 26 September 2024 (RU); RTVI, [The State Duma spoke about the summonses for the autumn conscription of 2024](#), 21 September 2024 (RU).

²⁹ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 29; RTVI, [De Doema sprak over de najaarsoproepen voor de dienstplicht in 2024](#), 21 September 2024 (RU).

³⁰ ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 1 November 2024; confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

³¹ See Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#), March 2023.

In addition, a travel ban applies from the day that the Ministry of Defence requests the executive authority of the Uniform Military Register to call up the individual (in other words, possibly even before the individual has received the digital summons). Additional information on this point is provided in [1.1.3.2](#) (travel ban).³²

Since October 2023, anyone ignoring the summons has been subject to a fine ranging from 10,000 to a maximum of 30,000 roubles.³³ If the court finds that a person has intentionally attempted to evade compulsory national service, this could result in a sentence of up to two years in prison.³⁴

Mass forced enlistment in a military unit

In practice, , digital summonses or simply text messages were sent by way of experimenting in Moscow as early as the autumn 2024 round. According to the media reports, police in Moscow were actively searching the streets, subways and home addresses for conscripts. These were then taken to a police station or escorted directly to a military assembly point. They then received a digital summons and had to register for compulsory national service. This group is reported to include conscripts who were entitled to deferment due to a medical condition. Despite the objection to the summons registered by their relatives, these conscripts were still transported to a military assembly point.³⁵ In addition to Moscow, such police actions took place in other parts of Russia (for example, in metro stations, shopping malls, catering establishments, in people's homes and in student housing), in cooperation with the Presidential Guard. Particularly towards the end of the autumn round in late December 2024, there were reports of coercion being applied to conscripts to report to the recruitment office through such means as threats, violence, handcuffs and electric tasers, and procedural rules regarding medical examination were ignored. Conscripts were sent to a military assembly point immediately after appearing at the recruitment office, even if they had objected to this. Filing objections in these cases no longer resulted in the suspension of the summons.³⁶ The scale at which this occurred is not known.

A new kind of recruitment office was launched in Moscow in March 2024: a single conscription point (SCP).³⁷ Conscripts were required to relinquish their phones upon arrival, and entry and exit were secured by passes. They were not allowed to bring in a confidential adviser or lawyer. Critics fear that, in such an SCP, lack of outward communication and the impossibility of leaving the premises will make it even more

³² Confidential source dated 5 November 2024; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024.

³³ The Moscow Times, [Russia Ramps Up Fines for Draft Dodging](#), 31 July 2023; EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 29. Equivalent to 95 and 284 euros, respectively, according to xe.com (accessed 17 January 2025).

³⁴ RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU).

³⁵ Mediazona, [Hunting season](#), 28 May 2024 (RU); The Moscow Times, [Mass raids on conscripts resume in Moscow](#), 12 November 2024 (RU).

³⁶ Instructions Peace Plea, instructions.peaceplea.org, consulted on 3 December 2024; Telegram Peace Plea message [1024](#), [An appeal to conscience](#), 11 December 2024 (RU); The Insider, [Russia's fall conscription drive reaches new levels of brutality](#), 24 December 2024.

³⁷ Russian: [Единый пункт призыва на военную службу ЕРР](#); website [Gemeentedistrict Sokol](#) (Moscow), consulted on 15 January 2025.

difficult to apply for alternative compulsory national service or deferment, or to object.³⁸

1.1.3.1 Ignoring a summons – criminal and administrative penalties

Evading military service is punishable under Article 328 of the Penal Code (PC). Evading military service occurs if a conscript has failed to report to the military recruiting office to begin his compulsory military service or to apply for a deferral, after receiving a summons. According to sources from the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), a criminal case for evading military service could be brought if a conscript had ignored calls during two or more rounds of recruitment without objecting to the summons and if summonses had been served in accordance with the law. Summonses issued during the autumn round of conscription in 2024, pending the electronic Uniform Military Register, still had to be served personally and signed by the conscript, or delivered to the conscript by registered mail. According to the EUAA and a lawyer, in most criminal cases, only fines were imposed, and not detention.³⁹

Penalties for offences other than evading military service are set out in the Code of Administrative Offences (CAO). Failure to comply with a summons to provide data to the recruitment office was an administrative – not criminal – offence. The fine for failing to appear at the military recruitment office was increased tenfold to 30,000 roubles under the law of the July 2023, with effect from 1 October 2023⁴⁰ (Article 21.5 CAO). Since October 2023, failure to report leaving Russia for a period of more than six months, or having re-entered the country, has been subject to a trebled fine of 15,000 roubles,⁴¹ as has failure to report changes in employment, married status, study or residence address.⁴²

Residents of Crimea were forced into compulsory national service, including – and especially – Crimean Tatars. Between February 2022 and May 2024, 206 cases of criminal charges for evading military service in Crimea were recorded.⁴³

1.1.3.2 Ignoring summonses – other measures

In addition to making it more difficult to evade military service and the threat of penalties, the following measures were also taken in April 2023 to discourage the evasion of military service. If an individual fails to report to the recruitment office within twenty days of receiving the summons, a number of restrictive measures will go into effect: the individual will no longer be allowed to drive a car, can no longer receive benefits, can no longer make transactions involving real estate, cannot

³⁸ The Call to Conscience coalition et al., [The right to conscientious objection](#), 31 May 2024; The Insider, [Russia's fall conscription drive reaches new levels of brutality](#), 24 December 2024; EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 25.

³⁹ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 29; Verstka, [It's becoming almost impossible to avoid conscription](#), 11 April 2023 (RU).

⁴⁰ Equivalent to 284 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

⁴¹ Equivalent to 284 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

⁴² EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 29; Kommersant, [Putin Increases Fines for Failure to Appear on Subpoena and Failure to Assist Military Commissariats](#), 31 July 2023 (RU).

⁴³ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 25; Center for Civil Liberties, [The illegality of conscription of Crimean Tatars, and other Ukrainian civilians, into the Russian army in occupied territories](#), 30 December 2022; The New York Times, [Russia's Draft is targeting Crimean Tatars and other marginalized groups, according to activists](#), 27 September 2022.

register a company with the Chamber of Commerce and can no longer take out a loan.⁴⁴ Since 1 October 2023, fines have risen to a maximum of 30,000 roubles.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ The restrictive measures, including the travel ban, can be lifted after the individual has reported to a recruitment office.⁴⁷ These measures became legally effective immediately after their introduction, even if the digital system was not yet in place.⁴⁸ Due to practical difficulties in implementation, however, automatic application had not yet taken place during the reporting period; at most, case-by-case application occurred.⁴⁹

Travel ban

For conscripts, a travel ban applies from the day the Ministry of Defence requests the executive authority of the Uniform Military Register to call up the conscript (in other words, possibly even before the conscript has received the digital or physical summons). Because of the linking of data from healthcare agencies, training institutes and employers in the Uniform Military Register, once the register is introduced, the military recruitment office will know where the conscript is actually located, independently of the registered address.⁵⁰ According to media reports, the FSB border police were already able to access the travel restriction for conscripts in its systems during the autumn round of calls.⁵¹ According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL), conscripts in Moscow who had ignored the summons in the autumn round received information about the travel ban by text messages and the digital municipal portal mos.ru.⁵²

A travel ban previously applied to FSB officials, soldiers and others with access to state secrets (see also the previous Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation).⁵³ In July 2023, President Putin signed a legislative amendment that denied people the right to travel based on their actual access to state secrets, regardless of any previous or current employment contract. According to the Kremlin, this applies to a wide range of individuals, including senators, other deputies in popular assemblies, judges and governors. According to reports, some conscripts also had to sign a paper promising secrecy of state secrets. By signing

⁴⁴ The New York Times, [Russia Moves to Make Draft Evasion More Difficult](#), 12 April 2023; Verstka, [‘It’s becoming almost impossible to avoid conscription’](#), 11 April 2023 (RU);

⁴⁵ Equivalent to 142 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

⁴⁶ Open Democracy, [Russia plans crackdown on men avoiding the draft](#), 11 April 2023; EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 23; The Guardian, [Russia raises the maximum age of conscription](#), 26 July 2023.

⁴⁷ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024; IStories, [Conscripts in Moscow Were Notified About the Closure of Exit From the Country](#), 12 November 2024.

⁴⁹ IStories, [Conscripts in Moscow Were Notified About the Closure of Exit From the Country](#), 12 November 2024; confidential source dated 5 November 2024; Kommersant, [Restrictions for non-applying to the military enlistment office will be introduced not immediately, but in the next call](#), 11 April 2023 (RU).

⁵⁰ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024.

⁵¹ IStories, [Conscripts in Moscow Were Notified About the Closure of Exit From the Country](#), 12 November 2024.

⁵² RFERL, [Moscow Conscripts Banned From Leaving Russia](#), 13 November 2024; RFERL, [Conscripts have begun receiving notices banning them from leaving the Russian Federation](#), 12 November 2024 (RU); IStories, [Conscripts in Moscow Were Notified They Are Banned From Leaving the Country](#), 12 November 2024.

⁵³ See Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation, March 2023](#), p. 82.

this paper, these conscripts also fell under the travel ban.⁵⁴ One source indicated that conscripts are generally not given access to classified information, and that conscripts are generally subject to a travel ban only until the completion of their military service, and not on account of access to classified information.⁵⁵ The same applies to reservists who are part of the reserve after completing their compulsory national service.

Since 11 December 2023, conscripts who have been called up have had to surrender their international passports to Russian authorities. Only upon presentation of a military booklet stamped as proof of completion of compulsory military service can they get their passports back. Passports not surrendered in accordance with this law are invalidated in the systems. How conclusive these systems are, and whether the information is shared with border police, is not known.⁵⁶

1.1.4 *Exemption or alternative compulsory national service*

Military recruitment offices increasingly ignored appeals of conscripts to grounds for exemption (for example, medical grounds).⁵⁷ According to a Mediazona publication, conscientious objectors did still have a chance to obtain an exemption and enter alternative service, and the court could also grant an appeal against a rejection of alternative compulsory national service. If an individual had been sent to a military assembly point despite an appeal of conscientious objection, however, it was very difficult to file an appeal at that stage, given the heavy coercion and threats from soldiers. According to Mediazona, the number of Russians performing alternative compulsory national service in the first half of 2024 was 2,022 individuals – twice as many as the previous year. Given the increased number of requests for alternative compulsory national service (3 to 4 times more than before the war, according to *The Call to Conscience Coalition*), however, these requests were also often ignored or formally rejected. According to *The Call to Conscience Coalition*, the rejection percentage reached as high as 50% in some regions.⁵⁸ Exact data are nevertheless lacking with regard to how many rejections there were.

Requests for exemptions based on health complaints were increasingly ignored by military commissariats and military registration and recruitment offices.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Kremlin website, [Additional legislative measures to protect state secrets taken](#), 4 August 2023; IStories, [The Traitors, The Spies, The Terrorists](#), 18 October 2024; Novaya Gazeta, [Russians with access to state secrets ordered to notify FSB one month before going abroad](#), 21 May 2024; The Moscow Times, [Mass raids on conscripts resume in Moscow](#), 12 November 2024 (RU).

⁵⁵ Confidential source dated 12 February 2025.

⁵⁶ ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 11 December 2023; Business Insider, [Russia is seizing thousands of passports from people who might flee the war in Ukraine or run off with secrets](#), 12 December 2023; Policy guideline [no. 1953](#) dated 22 November 2023 (RU).

⁵⁷ Mediazona, [Hunting season. In Moscow, conscripts trying to escape the army were locked in a collection point and taken to a military unit at night](#), 28 May 2024; The Insider, [Russia's fall conscription drive reaches new levels of brutality](#), 24 December 2024.

⁵⁸ Mediazona, [Important questions about military registration and enlistment offices. summonses and your rights. Instructions from the 'Appeal to Conscience'](#), 1 October 2024 (RU); confidential source dated 5 November 2024; The Call to Conscience coalition et al., [The right to conscientious objection](#), 31 May 2024, p. 3 ff.

⁵⁹ RFERL, [Maximum Effort to Send to the Front: Conscription Campaign in the South and North Caucasus](#), 9 April 2024 (RU); EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p.26.

1.1.5 *Evading military service and desertion*

All the measures mentioned above – digital summonses, measures if summonses are not heeded – are intended to make refusal of military service more difficult. The government is thus focusing more on preventing the refusal of military service and desertion than on criminal prosecution. According to one source, one reason for this is the lack of capacity in military courts to criminally prosecute people who refused to perform compulsory national service or deserters.⁶⁰

Evading military service

Evading military service (Article 328 PC) may be punishable by detention of up to two years during a mobilisation period. In the case of conscripts, desertion occurs only if they have already been called up in accordance with the proper procedure and assigned to a military unit. Before one has been assigned to a military unit, the following acts thus do not fall under draft evasion and are therefore subject to administrative prosecution only: failing to respond to the summons or refusing to report to the military unit to which one has been assigned if one has not yet undergone a medical examination; feigning illness; changing residence without notifying the authorities; or leaving the Russian Federation without being deregistered.⁶¹

According to a calculation by opposition news website *Verstka*, 958 people were convicted of draft evasion, Article 328(1) PC, in 2023. In the first half of 2024, 427 people were convicted of this, according to the website. Incarceration was not imposed in any of these cases, only fines. Only an exceptionally small number of defendants were fined more than 100,000 roubles: ten in 2023, and five in the first half of 2024.⁶² No figures are available on the number of administrative prosecutions.

Desertion and absence without leave

After conscripts are enrolled in a military unit, they risk detention if they desert or are absent without leave. The offence of desertion (Article 338 PC, maximum fifteen years' detention) implies the intent to permanently not return to the military unit, which is more difficult to prove. For this reason, few soldiers were charged for desertion. For absence from the unit without leave (Article 337 PC, maximum ten years' detention, depending on the duration of the absence) and for disobeying an order (Article 332 PC), conscripts did face criminal prosecution, albeit in smaller numbers than mobilised reservists and contract soldiers. Exact figures are not available.⁶³ Additional information on criminal prosecution is provided in [1.4](#).

Information on the treatment of conscripts who refuse to sign a military contract is presented in [1.2.2](#).

1.1.6 *Deployment of conscripts in Ukraine*

According to a presidential decree, conscripts must have completed at least four months of military service and training to be sent to combat missions, unless a state

⁶⁰ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

⁶¹ Österreichisches Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, [Themenbericht Russische Föderation - Militärdienst vor dem Hintergrund des Ukraine-Kriegs](#), 2 April 2024, p. 24; Peaceplea, *Instructions: What counts as desertion?*, consulted on 21 December 2024.

⁶² Verstka, [Evasion of military service](#), 18 October 2024 (RU).

⁶³ Mediazona, [Evading > refusing > fleeing. A year of mobilization in Russia through trials and verdicts](#), 21 September 2023.

of war is declared, which had not happened as of the end of the reporting period.⁶⁴ If a state of war has been declared, however, conscripts can be called up earlier, and not just after four months.⁶⁵ Although it is thus legally possible to deploy conscripts for combat operations, as far as is known, Russia did not send out conscripts to the temporarily occupied territories in Ukraine during the reporting period.⁶⁶ According to one source, however, conscripts were deployed in illegally annexed Crimea.⁶⁷ Unlike conscripts, contract soldiers can be deployed in combat operations from the moment of taking the military oath, which must take place no later than two months after beginning military training.⁶⁸ Conscripts can sign a contract after starting their compulsory national service (see 1.2.2.4).

1.1.7 *Deployment of conscripts in Kursk and Belgorod*

Deployment of conscripts in combat areas did occur during the reporting period in battles outside Ukraine (in other words, in Kursk and Belgorod), where Ukrainian forces had invaded Russian territory.⁶⁹ Although no official figures are available on the number of conscript fatalities, there were reports of hundreds of conscripts deployed in defence in the Kursk and Belgorod region, and dozens who died, were taken prisoner of war by Ukrainian forces or with whom there was no further contact.⁷⁰ On 1 November 2024, RFERL referred to at least three deaths among conscripts in the Kursk region and more than eighty missing.⁷¹ In August 2024, BBC Russia estimated the total number of conscripts killed since the beginning of the Russian invasion in February 2022 to be at least 159.⁷²

In mid-August 2024, mothers of Russian conscripts evacuated from the front line in the Kursk region said that their sons, under threat of criminal prosecution, had been forced to sign contracts and return to the front. According to them, in one of the military units in the Kursk region, there had been about 150 conscripts who had been pressured to sign a contract.⁷³

⁶⁴ ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 19 October 2022; <https://base.garant.ru/180912/>; Österreichisches Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, [Russische Föderation - Militärdienst vor dem Hintergrund des Ukraine-Kriegs](#), 4 April 2024, p. 14.

⁶⁵ ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 30 October 2022.

⁶⁶ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU); ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 22 August 2024.

⁶⁷ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

⁶⁸ <https://base.garant.ru/180912/>; Österreichisches Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, [Russische Föderation - Militärdienst vor dem Hintergrund des Ukraine-Kriegs](#), 4 April 2024, p. 14.

⁶⁹ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024; RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU); ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 22 August 2024.

⁷⁰ BBC Russia, [There are some there. How Russian conscripts are dying in Russia's war with Ukraine](#), 9 August 2024; BBC Russia, [Dozens of conscripts disappeared near Kursk, the number of dead volunteers is growing](#), 23 August 2024.

⁷¹ RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU).

⁷² BBC Russia, [There are some there. How Russian conscripts are dying in Russia's war with Ukraine](#), 9 August 2024; BBC Russia, [Dozens of conscripts disappeared near Kursk, the number of dead volunteers is growing](#), 23 August 2024.

⁷³ RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU).

Conscripts were deployed in the Kursk region for border surveillance and similar tasks.⁷⁴ It is not known what further tasks conscripts had to perform.

1.2 Contract soldiers

Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Putin announced three times his intention to expand the troop contingent, most recently to a total of 2.3 million military personnel, including 1.5 million active-duty soldiers. According to his decision in September 2024, another 180,000 new soldiers would have to be recruited in the years 2025–2027. He thus increased the pressure on recruitment offices.⁷⁵

In September 2022, all temporary contracts were converted to open-ended contracts until the formal declaration of the end of mobilisation. Contracts of soldiers whose contracts expired were automatically extended until the end of mobilisation by presidential decree in September 2022. This means that the contract cannot be terminated mid-term. Even before the war, it had been more difficult to cancel a military contract than it was to cancel an employment contract in the private or public sector.⁷⁶ After mobilisation in September 2022, this was no longer possible at all, except for those who had reached the maximum age corresponding to their rank, had health problems or in case of a criminal conviction for detention.⁷⁷ The mobilisation had not yet ended in a legal sense during the reporting period (see 1.3).

1.2.1 Expansion of target groups: age limit, criminals, foreigners

To recruit more contract soldiers, the contingent of eligible people was increased by a number of measures: the age limits were broadened, people with more serious criminal records or embroiled in criminal proceedings could now be recruited, as well as foreigners and conscripts who had just started conscription. These measures are explained below.

Broadened age limits

The minimum age for contract soldiers was lowered to 18 years in spring 2023, without requiring prior completion of compulsory military service, and the maximum age raised from 50 to 65 years.⁷⁸ The independent *Holod* spoke to relatives of young adults aged 18 and 19 years who had been sent to the front after signing a military contract and two weeks of military training, and had died or been injured there.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ BBC Russia, [Dozens of conscripts disappeared near Kursk, the number of dead volunteers is growing](#), 23 August 2024.

⁷⁵ Novaya Gazeta, [Putin orders boost to Russian troop numbers with additional 180,000 service personnel](#), 16 September 2024; IStories, [Russia Plans to Recruit at Least 225,000 People on Contract with the Defense Ministry in the Next Three Years](#), 4 October 2024; New York Times, [September Was Deadly Month for Russian Troops in Ukraine, U.S. Says](#), 10 October 2024.

⁷⁶ The 'Call to Conscience' coalition et al., [The Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War](#), 31 May 2024.

⁷⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#), March 2023, p. 49; Meduza, [How getting out of the Russian army became all but impossible](#), 29 October 2024.

⁷⁸ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 33.

⁷⁹ The Meduza website published the study in English. Meduza, [Toy soldiers](#), 16 August 2024.

Criminals and suspects: Conditional sentences and dismissal of prosecution

In March 2024, President Putin signed a law⁸⁰ allowing people with criminal records or suspects of crimes under criminal investigation to sign a military contract with Russian Federation forces. Beginning in October 2024, defendants against whom criminal proceedings had already been opened could also opt for a military contract.⁸¹ This provision applies during mobilisation, martial law or time of war. Individuals suspected or convicted of sexual crimes against minors, terrorism or state security are exempted; they are not allowed to enter into a contract. In exchange for a military contract, it is legally possible to convert convictions to suspended sentences. Dismissal of prosecution may also occur if the person receives a military decoration or leaves the service due to health complaints, age or end of mobilisation period.⁸²

Public prosecutors regularly offered the possibility of entering into a contract in exchange for a criminal trial.⁸³ In the criminal case against the attackers at the office of the Wildberries company,⁸⁴ the defendants themselves asked for military service in lieu of prosecution.⁸⁵

'Storm-Z' battalions consist mainly of former prisoners recruited from detention in exchange for clearing their criminal records and financial compensation. They have to fight at the front under the most difficult conditions, with little support from the army. According to media reports, ordinary soldiers are also placed in such battalions, as punishment for not obeying orders, or as a disciplinary measure for drug or alcohol use.⁸⁶

Recruitment abroad

According to several media outlets, Russia has also drawn recruits from abroad (for example, from Nepal, Sri Lanka and Yemen), with the promise of Russian citizenship and high salaries.⁸⁷ Some of these people were recruited through human trafficking networks with false promises.⁸⁸ North Korea provided Russia with special units.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Federal law N° 61-FZ dated 23 March 2024.

⁸¹ Meduza, [New Russian law lets criminal suspects join the army at any stage of their trial](#), 8 October 2024.

⁸² Garant.ru, [SVO participants will be released from criminal liability – law signed](#), 25 March 2024.

⁸³ Confidential source dated 11 October 2024; Novaya Gazeta, [Woman accused of burning husband's corpse joins Russian army in Ukraine](#), 5 November 2024; IStories, ['War correspondent' Yegor Guzenko, accused of attacking a police officer, has been released from custody. He will go to war with Ukraine](#), 15 November 2024.

⁸⁴ Around 30 people were arrested in September 2024 after a shooting at the Wildberries company headquarters, in which two security guards were killed and several others were injured. The shooting was in response to a business dispute. See The Moscow Times, [Wildberries Founder's Ex-Husband Arrested After Deadly Office Shootout](#), 19 September 2024.

⁸⁵ RFERL, Putin Signs Law Allowing Criminal Defendants To Join Military, 3 October 2024; confidential source dated 11 October 2024.

⁸⁶ Reuters, ['They're just meat': Russia deploys punishment battalions in echo of Stalin](#), 3 October 2023.

⁸⁷ Newsweek, [Yemeni Fighters Reportedly Join Russia's War in Ukraine](#), 24 November 2024; RFERL, [Russia Reportedly Recruiting Fighters From Yemen Through Huthi Intermediaries](#), 24 November 2024; NOS, Financial Times: [Rusland rekruteert Jemenieten om te vechten in Oekraïne](#), 24 November 2024; Tamil Guardian, [Trapped in a different war](#), 25 November 2024.

⁸⁸ The New York Times, [How to Escape From the Russian Army](#), 27 June 2024.

⁸⁹ DW, [Ukraine reports first clash with North Korean troops](#), 6 November 2024; NRC, [Stuurt Moskou Noord-Koreaanse soldiers als 'kanonnenvoer' naar het front in Oekraïne?](#), 24 October 2024.

Migrants residing in Russia

Immigrants residing in Russia were also recruited to sign a contract and serve in the armed struggle with Ukraine. To this end, recruitment offices were opened in offices of the migration service. Migrant workers – mainly from Central Asia, but also from India, Somalia and Syria – were forced to sign contracts in police raids. Those without a valid residence permit also faced the threat of deportation. This happened especially in the Moscow and St Petersburg regions, where many migrant workers are located. Russian citizenship was also promised as a reward for serving out a so-called 'temporary contract' and, in some cases, this was even included as a condition for naturalisation.⁹⁰ In addition, a law entered into force in August 2024 allowing deprivation of Russian citizenship for naturalised Russians failing to report for military service.⁹¹

1.2.2 Recruitment: Government campaign and targets

During this reporting period, the recruitment of contract soldiers was characterised by a large-scale recruitment campaign and pressure on local authorities through targets.

1.2.2.1 Campaign in public spaces and through employers

To meet its increasing troop-expansion targets, the Russian government conducted a major recruitment campaign for people to sign contracts. To this end, advertisements and films were used on social media, and posters in public spaces, including libraries, public transport stops and municipal offices. A military career was presented as an attractive future prospect for men who, for example, had no money, an alcohol addiction or other problems. In addition, both private and state-owned companies became part of the recruitment campaign: they were financially rewarded for convincing their staff to sign up as contract soldiers. As a result, companies were recruiting new staff only to sign them up for contracts immediately thereafter. That way, they did not have to give up their own well-trained and long-experienced specialists.⁹² Due to mounting pressure on employers, some employees were asked by their employers to sign military contracts so that the employer would meet the said target. The contracts would then be cancelled again. Contrary to what was promised, however, these contracts were not cancelled, but the employees were deployed to the front.⁹³ The scale at which this occurred is not known.

Private groups other than companies (for example, posing as the former Wagner mercenary army, and a veterans' organisation) also recruited contract soldiers, mostly of foreign origin,⁹⁴ through 'blank' employment constructions. In addition,

⁹⁰ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, pp. 12 and 13; Landinfo, [Russland: Rekruttering til krigen i Ukraina](#), 8 August 2024.

⁹¹ Federal Law of 08.08.2024 № 281-FZ; Mediazona, [Important questions about military registration and enlistment offices, summonses and your rights. Instructions from the 'Appeal to Conscience'](#), 1 October 2024 (RU).

⁹² Landinfo, [Russland: Rekruttering til krigen i Ukraina](#), 8 August 2024; RFERL, [Inside Russia's Improvised System For Mobilizing Men For The Ukraine War](#), 15 May 2024;

⁹³ Meduza, [Desperate for new army recruits, Russian authorities resort to planting drugs and posting fake job ads](#), 13 November 2024;

⁹⁴ This employment construction was rigged so that the company could receive the signing bonus from the Ministry of Defence. No actual employment followed, as the employee in question was immediately forwarded to the army.

people were offered a bonus of 50,000 roubles for proposing an acquaintance as a contract soldier.⁹⁵

1.2.2.2 Targets for local government

In addition to the public and employer campaigns, the government worked with targets by region, or even district.⁹⁶ According to a journalistic investigation by IStories, civilian government officials of local municipalities in charge of recruitment were under great pressure to meet targets. For example, results of their recruitment efforts were included in their assessments. Not only local municipalities, but all government agencies reportedly made efforts for recruitment – from ministries to state media to employment offices. According to that same investigation, local governments in at least one province had been urged to target men with military experience, and men from vulnerable groups (for example, the homeless, unemployed), as well as men with criminal records or against whom criminal investigations were ongoing, prisoners, migrants without residency status, and people in debt. According to one official from a recruitment office, as quoted in the November 2023 survey, about as many people would apply of their own accord as would be put forward by local authorities for a contract.⁹⁷ This information could not be verified with other sources.

The independent news website Meduza reported on recruitment offices posing as civilian employers and advertising civilian positions. Not until they arrived for the job interview did people realise that they were applying to the army. Some cases were also reported in which drugs were planted by the police. A military contract was subsequently offered in exchange for dropping the criminal charges.⁹⁸

According to activists, others were given promises to continue their civilian occupations with the army in non-combat positions, even though this turned out not to be the case.⁹⁹

1.2.2.3 Financial incentives

In addition to debt forgiveness for new recruits (a measure effective from 1 December 2024),¹⁰⁰ the Ministry of Defence also offered increasingly higher signing bonuses and salaries, which were exorbitant for poorer Russians. According to investigative journalists at IStories, the budget for signing bonuses amounted to 13% of the entire social security budget. In some regions, half of the social security

⁹⁵ Confidential source dated 19 July 2024; RFERL, [Inside Russia's Improvised System For Mobilizing Men For The Ukraine War](#), 15 May 2024;

⁹⁶ IStories, ['Volunteers' for War: Migrants, Bankrupts, Debtors and the Unemployed](#), 2 November 2023 (RU); Currenttime.tv, [Taxes instead of Mobilization](#), 14 May 2024.

⁹⁷ IStories, ['Volunteers' for War: Migrants, Bankrupts, Debtors and the Unemployed](#), 2 November 2023 (RU); Landinfo, [Russland: Rekruttering til krigen i Ukraina](#), 8 August 2024.

⁹⁸ Meduza, [Desperate for new army recruits, Russian authorities resort to planting drugs and posting fake job ads](#), 13 November 2024; Moscow Times, [How Russia's covert mobilization finds manpower for the war](#), 21 May 2024.

⁹⁹ Meduza, [Desperate for new army recruits, Russian authorities resort to planting drugs and posting fake job ads](#), 13 November 2024; Moscow Times, [How Russia's covert mobilization finds manpower for the war](#), 21 May 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Meduza, [Russia passes law allowing war participants to write off debts worth \\$100,000](#), 20 November 2024; DW, [Russia offers debt relief to recruits for Ukraine war](#), 23 November 2024; Business Insider, [Putin signs law allowing some Russian recruits to write off bad debts](#), 24 November 2024; ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 1 November 2024; Meduza, [Even after doubling its sign-on bonus payment, the Russian army's recruitment rate is falling](#), 4 December 2024.

budget went to social benefits for veterans and their families.¹⁰¹ In addition, financial incentives consisted of mortgage forgiveness¹⁰² and increased social benefits for veterans. Some returning contract soldiers complained that the financial disbursements they had been promised were not made, or were made only in part.¹⁰³

1.2.2.4 Recruitment of conscripts

Since July 2023, conscripts have been able to enter into a contract almost immediately after the start of their compulsory military service (conscription).¹⁰⁴ In July 2023, the Duma passed legislation allowing conscripts to enter into a contract for military service 'for a period of one year or less'.¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that, in practice, during mobilisation, temporary contracts are not temporary, but valid indefinitely (see the beginning of [1.2](#)).

Error

In some cases, conscripts were persuaded by their commander to sign a so-called 'fixed-term' contract. Later, it became apparent that these temporary contracts were also valid indefinitely during the war. Interim termination was not possible.¹⁰⁶

Other conscripts reported that they had unexpectedly been paid salaries much higher than their compulsory military service pay. For example, in October 2024, media reported on at least seven conscripts, each of which had received 305 thousand roubles¹⁰⁷ because they had supposedly signed a contract with the Ministry of Defence. They nevertheless knew nothing about this.¹⁰⁸ In these cases, it is suspected that the contracts had been signed for them. From their compulsory military service station, it was virtually impossible to take legal action against this with the aim of having such a contract dissolved by a court.¹⁰⁹ The Duma referred to payments based on fake contracts as 'technical error'.¹¹⁰

Coercion with conscripts

Even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the recruitment of conscripts as contract soldiers was commonplace. During the reporting period, independent media and NGOs reported that conscripts were increasingly being pressured to sign a contract. The scale at which coercion was actually used is not known, however, as conscripts are not very likely to make this widely known.¹¹¹ The Russian military has

¹⁰¹ IStories, [Wartime social security](#), 11 November 2024 (RU).

¹⁰² In some regions, the bonus amounted to 1 million roubles. See ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 1 November 2024; Meduza, [Even after doubling its sign-on bonus payment, the Russian army's recruitment rate is falling](#), 4 December 2024.

¹⁰³ Moscow Times, [How Russia's covert mobilization finds manpower for the war](#), 21 May 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Klein, M., [How Russia Is Recruiting for the Long War](#), *SWP Comment*, No. 24, 27 June 2024, p. 3; confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Kommersant, [For those under Thirty](#), 25 July 2023 (RU).

¹⁰⁶ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Equivalent to 2,895 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

¹⁰⁸ RFERL, ['We are terrified, we don't want to fight'. Conscripts are paid under fake contracts](#), 20 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, [More Russian conscripts paid for enforced 'contract' service](#), 23 October 2024; confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024; ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 23 October 2024.

¹¹⁰ RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU);

¹¹¹ RFERL, [In Russia, a register with electronic summons to the army has been launched](#), 1 November 2024 (RU); The 'Call to Conscience' coalition et al., [The Right to Conscientious](#)

a traditional culture of violent hazing or '*dedovschina*' (see also the previous COI Report).¹¹²

The increasing pressure is also evidenced by the following. In March 2024, the independent news platform *Verstka* reported that conscripts could be forced to sign a military contract by persuasion, an attractive salary, error regarding the length of the contract, and if refused, also by verbal and physical violence. However, by signing a document prior to compulsory national service stating that one did not wish to sign a contract, one purportedly had another chance to refuse in spring 2024.¹¹³ In autumn 2024, eight months later, *Verstka* – referring to the NGOs Go to the Forest and School of Conscript – reported on an increase in cases in which conscripts were forced to sign a military contract since August 2024. In addition, according to the same reports, there have been cases in which conscripts were pressured to sign a military contract at a much earlier stage than before – in the first days of compulsory national service.¹¹⁴

Some extreme cases of assault and killing appeared in the media. In early December 2024, independent Russian media reported on a 19-year-old conscript, Artyom Antonov, from Tatarstan, who had refused to sign a contract and fight in the Kursk region while fulfilling his compulsory military service on the border with China. According to reports, this conscript had been abused by his superiors with a metal rod to get him to sign, and he was eventually killed.¹¹⁵

The family of another conscript, Andrei Lazhiev, also reported that he had suffered a fatal head wound in beatings because he refused to sign a contract. The actual facts could not be verified.¹¹⁶

According to one source, not every conscript was forced to sign a contract, nor did they succeed in persuading every conscript by force. Commanders would direct their threats of violence and humiliation, and their actual application, primarily against those who were less powerful and less informed about their rights. Compared to candidate contract soldiers, conscripts were more often exposed to coercion and threats of force, or actual applications of force, given that they were already in military barracks. According to this source, coercion by force was therefore more common amongst conscripts than it was amongst contract soldiers, who decide to sign a contract from civilian life¹¹⁷ (see 1.1.3).

[Objection to Military Service in Russia During Full-Scale War](#), 31 May 2024, p. 6; Reuters, [Ukraine's Kursk incursion tests young Russian conscripts' mettle](#), 29 August 2024; Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Klein, M., [How Russia Is Recruiting for the Long War, SWP Comment](#), No. 24, 27 June 2024; confidential source dated 5 November 2024; confidential email dated 12 February 2025.

¹¹² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#), April 2021, p. 52.

¹¹³ *Verstka*, [Service to contract: 'It's hard to protect yourself when you're inside'](#), 27 March 2024 (RU).

¹¹⁴ *Verstka*, [Human rights activists have reported an increase in the number of complaints from conscripts about being forced to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defense](#), 13 November 2024.

¹¹⁵ The name 'Artyom' is also spelled 'Artem'. Novaya Gazeta, [Russian conscript tortured and killed for refusing to fight in Ukraine](#), 7 December 2024; IStories, [19-year-old conscript shot in Primorye after refusing to go to fight in Kursk Oblast](#), 6 December 2024 (RU).

¹¹⁶ RFERL, [Young Russian Conscript's Father Suspects Son May Have Been Beaten To Death For Refusing To Fight In Ukraine](#), 26 November 2023.

¹¹⁷ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

1.2.3 *Mercenary armies*

In Ukraine, mercenary armies fought in addition to the regular army (with professional and contract soldiers) and reservists. These were partly funded by major Russian companies, including the Wagner Group (in the past). Under the Russian Penal Code, the recruitment, training, financing and material supply of mercenaries and their use within the context of armed conflicts or hostilities is prohibited and punishable by a custodial sentence of at least twelve years. A number of mercenary armies nevertheless did exist, mainly affiliated with individuals from the security apparatus (*siloviki*), so-called 'governor's armies', as well as private or semi-private mercenary formations owned by oligarchs and state-owned companies (in other words, private military companies, or PMC). In Ukraine, the Russian Ministry of Defence used various mercenary formations and PMCs at different times, thus blurring the lines between private groups and state-subordinate entities.¹¹⁸

The Russian military tried to gain control of such units. Mercenary armies were able to join the Ministry of Defence until July 2023. The most well-known mercenary army, the Wagner Group, was brought under the direct control of the Ministry of Defence. The leader of the Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and several other high-ranking Wagner soldiers died in a plane crash in August 2023. Critics suspected that this was not an accident. That summer, Prigozhin had unleashed and subsequently aborted a mutiny.¹¹⁹

In recruiting contract soldiers, officials targeted former mercenaries, amongst others, (see 1.2.2).¹²⁰ In recruiting contract soldiers, recruitment offices posed as spin-offs from Wagner.¹²¹

As far as is known, there is no evidence indicating whether these private armies still offered temporary contracts, nor is it known what the policy was towards deserting mercenary soldiers.

1.2.4 *Chechnya/Kadirovtsy*

According to research by the Danish and Swedish Immigration Services, Chechen recruitment proceeds through three different tactics, which have developed over the course of the war:¹²²

- Persuasion and patriotism: particularly at the beginning of the war, reservists voluntarily signed contracts to serve in Ukraine out of personal conviction; however, this motivation is said to have since subsided. In addition, according to independent media, there were often fewer contract soldiers than Chechen President Kadirov made it appear. It is assumed that

¹¹⁸ Österreichisches Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, [Russische Föderation - Militärdienst vor dem Hintergrund des Ukraine-Kriegs](#), 4 April 2024, p. 14; Jamestown Foundation, [After Prigozhin: The Anatomy of Russia's Evolving Private Military and Mercenary Industry](#), 3 March 2024.

¹¹⁹ Österreichisches Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, [Russische Föderation - Militärdienst vor dem Hintergrund des Ukraine-Kriegs](#), 4 April 2024, p. 14; Jamestown Foundation, [After Prigozhin: The Anatomy of Russia's Evolving Private Military and Mercenary Industry](#), 3 March 2024.

¹²⁰ IStories, ['Volunteers' for War: Migrants, Bankrupts, Debtors and the Unemployed](#), 2 November 2023 (RU); Österreichisches Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl, [Russische Föderation - Militärdienst vor dem Hintergrund des Ukraine-Kriegs](#), 4 April 2024, p. 14.

¹²¹ RFERL, [Inside Russia's Improvised System For Mobilizing Men For The Ukraine War](#), 15 May 2024;

¹²² Migrationsverket, [Russia – Recruitment of Chechens to the War in Ukraine](#), April 2024.

willingness to serve was low, partly because very few Chechen men had completed the compulsory military service.¹²³

- Financial incentives: In particular, people from poorer regions in Chechnya signed contracts for high salaries, as compared to the modal income in Chechnya.
- Force: Especially at the time of the mobilisation in late September 2022, coercion was used to get people to sign a contract. The scale at which this occurred, and when, are unclear. According to Mark Galeotti, forced recruitment occurred mainly in Grozny, where financial incentives attracted fewer recruits, because economic conditions in Grozny are better in comparison to other regions, and recruitment offices therefore failed to meet their targets.¹²⁴ Recruiting was also used as punishment against certain groups (for example, critics of the regime), sometimes even for following a 'wrong' Telegram channel. Relatives of critics were also said to risk punitive recruitment. In addition, at least one local police chief was known to have extorted relatives to pay money so that men who had been arrested would not be sent to the front in Ukraine.¹²⁵

1.3 Mobilisation of reservists

In July 2023, the Russian parliament raised the maximum age at which men could be mobilised. Ages vary by rank and category of reservists. General reservists were subject to a maximum age limit of 40, 50 or 55 years, depending on the reservist categories into which they fell. This was an increase from the previous maximum age of 45 years. In addition, the highest ranks in the reserve could be called up to the age of 70 years, and men with junior ranks could be called up to 60 years of age.¹²⁶ An explanation of the various categories of reservists is provided in the previous COI Report.¹²⁷

No more mobilisation summonses were issued during the reporting period. In legal terms, however, the mobilisation has not ended.¹²⁸ According to the government and Kremlin media, there are no plans to issue further mobilisation summonses.¹²⁹ In September 2024, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) also reported that Putin wanted to postpone a mobilisation for as long as possible, despite the lack of troops, in order to avoid civil unrest.¹³⁰ At the same time, however, measures were taken to ensure the success of a possible next round of mobilisations (for example, with the introduction of the Uniform Military Register and digital summonses). In

¹²³ Novaya Gazeta Europe, [An army of one](#), 4 September 2024.

¹²⁴ Interview met Mark Galeotti, British historian and Russia expert, in Migrationsverket, [Russia – Recruitment of Chechens to the War in Ukraine](#), April 2024, p. 47 ff.

¹²⁵ The Insider, [«Threatening mothers and sisters.» How Chechen «volunteers» are forcibly sent to fight in Ukraine](#), 15 June 2022; Migrationsverket, [Russia – Recruitment of Chechens to the War in Ukraine](#), April 2024.

¹²⁶ Business Insider, [Russia is trying to keep its army going](#), 19 July 2023; Reuters, [Russia extends eligibility for military call-up by at least five years](#), 19 July 2023.

¹²⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#), pp. 53, 54 ff.

¹²⁸ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 31; confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

¹²⁹ Kommersant, [General Staff: No second wave of mobilization planned](#), 31 March 2023.

¹³⁰ ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 19 September 2024; Levada Center, [Conflict with Ukraine: September 2022](#), 7 October 2022.

addition, during the reporting period, active-duty reservists did continue¹³¹ to be called up for military training periods of up to two months, as is customary for reservists. In some regions, this was done through electronic calls, which were announced in Kremlin-owned media.¹³² The number of reservists was also increased because of the aforementioned extension of the age limits for reservists, and also because there were more conscripts who automatically became reservists after completing their compulsory national service: the age limits for conscripts were extended, and men with Russian citizenship in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian regions also became conscripts.¹³³ In addition, the measures taken against conscripts for ignoring a summons also went into effect for reservists.¹³⁴

Ignoring a personally received mobilisation summons at the time of mobilisation (in other words, before the end of October 2022) was punishable under administrative law with a maximum fine of 30,000 roubles;^{135, 136} it was not subject to criminal penalty. Although Deputy Minister Kartapolov announced criminal charges for ignoring a mobilisation summons, this law has not yet been passed.¹³⁷ Reservists who were already enrolled in a military unit and only then refused did face criminal charges (see [1.4.1](#) and [1.4.2](#)).¹³⁸

Both mobilised reservists and contract soldiers were called up for an indefinite period.¹³⁹ No information is available on the number of reservists still deployed in armed combat at the time of publication of this COI Report.

Prosecution

People who had received a mobilisation summons prior to the so-called 'termination' of mobilisation at the end of October 2022 were required to report and, strictly speaking, they were thus subject to an administrative fine if they failed to do so. No criminal cases were opened for this during the reporting period, only administrative fines. The extent to which the authorities actively imposed fines for people who had received a summons in the last weeks before the end of October 2022 is not known. Nor is it known what happens to reservists upon returning to Russia after ignoring a mobilisation summons.

¹³¹ An explanation of 'active-duty reservists' is provided in Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 55.

¹³² Kommersant, [Reservists and reserve military personnel called to training camp](#), 5 October 2023; Kommersant, [Kartapolov: Electronic summonses for military training will be sent in a number of regions](#), 5 October 2023 (RU).

¹³³ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [Wie Russland für einen langen Krieg rekrutiert](#), Margarete Klein, 26 June 2024.

¹³⁴ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, [Wie Russland für einen langen Krieg rekrutiert](#), Margarete Klein, 26 June 2024; Meduza, [Russian lawmaker says legalization of electronic military summonses will apply to all draft-eligible citizens, not just annual conscripts](#), 11 April 2023;

¹³⁵ In July 2023, the amount of the fine was increased from a maximum of 3,000 roubles to a standard amount of 30,000 roubles, equivalent to 284 euros (according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025). See Landinfo, [Russland: Rekruttering til krigen i Ukraina](#), 8 August 2024.

¹³⁶ Mediazona, [A year of mobilization in courts and sentences](#), 21 September 2023; Kommersant, [Kartapolov: failure to appear at the military registration and enlistment office during mobilization will be considered evasion, punishable by up to 5 years](#), 4 August 2023; EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024.

¹³⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 65.

¹³⁹ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 32;

In criminal proceedings for desertion, absence without leave or refusal of orders, the authorities did not distinguish between mobilised reservists and contract soldiers. This distinction is also not made in the statistics published in media (see [1.4](#)).

1.4 Penalties for contract soldiers, reservists and conscripts

1.4.1 Penalties

The criminal penalties described below apply to conscripts who have been called up and already assigned to a military unit, as well as to mobilised reservists enrolled in a military unit, and contract soldiers. Conscripts are additionally subject to administrative penalties if they fail to respond to a summon (see [1.1.3.1](#) (Compulsory national service)). Reservists are subject to prosecution under administrative law if they ignore a summons (see [1.3](#) – Mobilisation).

Confiscation as punishment

In February 2024, new legislation was passed that made it possible for financial resources and property used for activities directed against Russia's state security to be seized and confiscated. Under this new law, intentional activities directed against state security include (but are not limited to) desertion (Article 338 PC) and non-compliance with orders (Article 332 PC). This law applies only to convictions for desertion and non-compliance with orders after enactment of the law (in other words, after 7 February 2024).¹⁴⁰ Further information on the confiscation of property is provided in [3.1](#).

Absence without leave (Article 337 PC)¹⁴¹

The legal maximum penalty for absence without leave depends on the duration of the absence:

- absence without leave between two and ten days: restriction of freedom or disciplinary measures for up to five years;
- absence without leave between ten days and one month: up to a maximum of seven years' detention;
- absence without leave more than one month: detention in a penal colony for between five and ten years.¹⁴²

Non-compliance with orders – Article 332(2.1) PC

Since an amendment to Article 63 PC from 24 September 2022, refusal of military service in the form of failing to comply with the order of a superior (issued in accordance with established procedure) and refusal to participate in military acts or hostilities have been punishable by up to two to three years' detention if there were aggravating circumstances. Since the amendment of the law, mobilisation, martial law or war also constitute such aggravating circumstances. Other aggravating

¹⁴⁰ Meduza, [Putin signs law enabling asset seizure for convictions related to desertion, genocide, and 'fake news' about army](#), 14 February 2024;

¹⁴¹ In the literature, this crime is also referred to by the abbreviation AWOL.

¹⁴² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 48;

circumstances had already included recidivism, serious consequences of the crime and group perpetration.¹⁴³

According to research by the independent news medium *Mediazona*, in the first year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, most soldiers were charged with absence without leave from the unit (Article 337 PC, 'AWOL') and refusal to comply with an order (Article 332 PC). In the year after mobilisation, the military courts received more than three thousand indictments for absence without leave from the unit at the time of mobilisation (Article 337 PC), with mobilisation charged as an aggravating circumstance. Such cases had increased significantly since March 2023, and AWOL cases peaked in July 2023 – when courts received 500 cases in a single calendar month.¹⁴⁴

Other penalties were assigned as well, in addition to those mentioned above. Objections to these penalties were less common.

Desertion – Article 338 PC

Section 338 PC makes desertion punishable under the aggravating circumstance by up to fifteen years.¹⁴⁵ The difference with absence without leave is the intent not to return to the unit.

Voluntary surrender – Article 352.1 PC

Voluntary surrender to the enemy is punishable by criminal detention of three to ten years (Article 352.1), unless there are characteristics of treason. In that case, trial under Article 275 PC (high treason) may take place.¹⁴⁶

In addition to the aforementioned penalties and dismissals, there are also threats of coercion and assault, especially for soldiers who are already in a military unit or who are already in Ukraine.

1.4.2 Possibility of desertion for mobilised and contract soldiers

According to media reports, it proved very difficult for mobilised reservists and contract soldiers to desert or refuse to fight if they had already joined a military unit. In practice, soldiers refusing to fight or wishing to end their military service were punished by superiors with severe assault and extrajudicial detention. The scale at which this occurred is not known. Media reported large numbers of cases of torture and assault, partly in makeshift prisons for alleged deserters, partly in pits in the ground or in cages, or tied to a tree. Some of these cases involved fatalities. If

¹⁴³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 48; Meduza, [A new Russian law suggests the country is preparing for mobilization](#), 20 September 2022; Interfax, [Putin signs amendments to the Russian Criminal Code on looting, desertion and surrender](#), 24 September 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Mediazona, [Evading > refusing > fleeing. A year of mobilization in Russia through trials and verdicts](#), 21 September 2023;

¹⁴⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 48; *Federal Law dated 14 July 2022 № 260-FZ (RU)*.

¹⁴⁶ Mediazona, [Evading > refusing > fleeing. A year of mobilization in Russia through trials and verdicts](#), 21 September 2023;

soldiers themselves asked to be criminally prosecuted for refusing an order rather than being sent back to the front, it was often refused, given the lack of troops.¹⁴⁷

Soldiers who did manage to leave their military units without permission were likely to be arrested in Russia. These soldiers could be traced by the military authorities within Russia through Russian payment traffic, through mobile phone traffic and the public transport network.¹⁴⁸ Independent media reported that one of the twelve divisions active in the war had shared a list of more than one thousand unauthorised absent soldiers ('sochniks') with regional authorities, with the request to track them down.¹⁴⁹ Even if soldiers managed to return home unhindered, there was a chance that people in their hometown would recognise them and report them to the authorities.¹⁵⁰

Russians with access to state secrets are prohibited from leaving Russia without permission; this includes people in military service with actual access to state secrets, regardless of the nature of their appointment.¹⁵¹ According to one human rights lawyer, leaving Russia was possible if a soldier deserted while on leave and crossed the border to a foreign country within two to three weeks, as the police did not respond that quickly. It is unclear how this will change once the electronic Uniform Military Register is fully operational and can be used to block exit.¹⁵² See the previous COI Report,¹⁵³ and, for information on the travel ban for conscripts, see [1.1.3.2](#).

Deserters – including conscripts – usually fled to Kazakhstan or Armenia, as border crossings to those countries required only a domestic passport, and not an international passport.¹⁵⁴ RFERL reported on several deserters who were wanted in Russia and who were arrested by Russian military police on Armenian territory and transferred to Russia.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁷ Mediazona, [Relatives of Russian fighters recount tales of a torture prison in a Donetsk suburb](#), 22 November 2024; IStories, [A Runaway Regiment](#), 19 November 2024; Holod, [Russian commander's wife kidnapped him from the army](#), 27 July 2024 (RU); Mediazona, [Torture, Bribes, and an escape](#), 11 December 2024; Meduza, [How getting out of the Russian army became all but impossible](#), 29 October 2024.

¹⁴⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 82 ff.; Meduza, [How a Russian draftee, tortured by his commander, fled the army and continues to evade capture](#), 13 December 2024.

¹⁴⁹ IStories, [A Runaway Regiment](#), 19 November 2024.

¹⁵⁰ Meduza, [Russians deserting the army often turn to their families for help — but in small communities, hiding can prove impossible](#), 1 October 2024; Mediazona, [Torture, Bribes, and an escape](#), 11 December 2024.

¹⁵¹ Kremlin website, [Additional legislative measures to protect state secrets taken](#), 4 August 2023; IStories, [The Traitors, The Spies, The Terrorists](#), 18 October 2024; Novaya Gazeta, [Russians with access to state secrets ordered to notify FSB one month before going abroad](#), 21 May 2024; The Moscow Times, [Mass raids on conscripts resume in Moscow](#), 12 November 2024 (RU).

¹⁵² IStories, [A Runaway Regiment](#), 19 November 2024.

¹⁵³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 68.

¹⁵⁴ Eurasian Economic Union member states – Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – allow Russians to enter their territories without requiring an international passport. The domestic passport is required. See Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 84; IStories, [A Runaway Regiment](#), 19 November 2024.

¹⁵⁵ RFERL, [Russian Soldier Who Fled War In Ukraine Captured In Armenia](#), 10 April 2024, RFERL, [Armenia detains Russian activist wanted by Moscow on 'Terrorism' charges](#), 21 October 2024.

1.4.3 *Actual prosecution*

With regard to soldiers – including reservists and contract soldiers – who managed to desert or remain absent without leave from their units for long periods, the government pursued an active policy of investigation and prosecution. During the reporting period, the Russian Supreme Court stopped publishing court rulings on crimes during military service, as it was classified as confidential information.¹⁵⁶ Independent media did manage to collect and analyse data regarding these court cases. The number of convictions for crimes related to military service (for example, desertion, disobeying orders) trebled in 2024 compared to 2023, and it was 7.5 times higher compared to years before the invasion of Ukraine. In March 2024, 700 convictions were handed down for absence without leave.¹⁵⁷ In July 2024, there were around 1,000 convictions.¹⁵⁸

Exoneration almost never occurs in Russian criminal law.¹⁵⁹ In many cases, criminal proceedings ended in suspended sentences, allowing the convict to return to the front line. The percentage of suspended sentences was around 40% for military service offences, and even higher for convictions for absence without leave. On average, around 22% of all convictions for criminal offences result in suspended sentences.¹⁶⁰

1.5 **Anti-Russian military (and paramilitary) groups**

In Ukraine, several units consisting exclusively of Russian soldiers fought alongside the Ukrainian army against Russia. For example, the Freedom of Russia Legion – formed of Russian soldiers who had been taken as prisoners of war in Ukraine and Russian soldiers who voluntarily joined this legion – has existed since around April 2022. The legion consisted of around 500 men, and it also accepted people applying from Russia. Noted activist Ildar Dadin fought against Russia with the Freedom of Russia Legion. He was killed in October 2024.¹⁶¹

The Russian Volunteer Corps (RVC) has existed since around August 2022. The exact number of fighters was not known, but it was estimated at 30 to 150 men. In November 2023, a Russian court sentenced the RVC captain, Denis Kapustin, in absentia to detention for life under the most severe regime for state treason. He was registered in Russia as a terrorist.¹⁶² A second life sentence followed in November, along with four fellow RVC fighters.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Mediazona, [When soldiers say no](#), 11 April 2023;

¹⁵⁷ IStories, [The Traitors, The Spies, The Terrorists](#), 18 October 2024; Mediazona, [34 AWOL sentences a day. Russian military courts set a new record in March 2024](#), 12 April 2024.

¹⁵⁸ IStories, [A Runaway Regiment](#), 19 November 2024.

¹⁵⁹ Exoneration takes place in about 0.15% of cases in Russian criminal law. Novaya Gazeta, [Guilty-oriented justice](#), 10 June 2023.

¹⁶⁰ IStories, [A Runaway Regiment](#), 19 November 2024; confidential source dated 5 November 2024; Mediazona, [34 AWOL sentences a day. Russian military courts set a new record in March 2024](#), 12 April 2024.

¹⁶¹ BBC, [Russian opposition activist killed fighting for Ukraine](#), 7 October 2024.

¹⁶² Deutsche Welle, [Who are the Russian volunteers fighting for Ukraine?](#), 24 May 2023; RFERL, [Moscow Court Sentences Leader Of Russian Volunteer Corps Fighting On Ukraine's Side To Life](#), 16 November 2023.

¹⁶³ Meduza [Telegram message 116732](#), 14 November 2024.

2 LGBTIQ+ people

For LGBTIQ+ people, the reporting period was characterised primarily by further state repression, increasing hatred from society and declining space to express themselves and organise as a community. This development played out against the backdrop of wider state propaganda that championed traditional family values¹⁶⁴ and agitated against a supposedly Western 'LGBTIQ+ ideology'. The two most striking moments of this systematic state repression were the designation of the so-called, non-existent 'international LGBT movement' as an extremist organisation on 30 November 2023 (2.1); and the ban on gender-affirming surgery and hormone treatments for transgender people in July 2023 (2.5). The broader developments are explained below.

Treatment by the government

According to NGOs, the government targeted not only activists and NGOs, but increasingly anyone involved in the LGBTIQ+ community in any way. The ban on 'LGBT propaganda' had already been tightened in December 2022. Since then, LGBTIQ+-related expressions have been banned for all target groups, regardless of the age of the target group. Fines were also increased.¹⁶⁵ Examples of such expressions include displaying the rainbow flag or depicting same-sex partners. This expansion of the target audience in the Propaganda Act¹⁶⁶ thus also led to self-censorship and administrative fines for LGBTIQ+ people, businesses and officials¹⁶⁷ (see also 2.3 – Anti-propaganda Law). Others reported on official promotion of homophobia, including campaigns on state media that portrayed LGBTIQ+ individuals as 'perverts' and conflated homosexuality with paedophilia.¹⁶⁸

Treatment by society

In addition to this systematic repression from the government, this reporting period was also marked by increasing stigmatisation and discrimination in society. Activists reported that most LGBTIQ+ individuals hid their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace for fear of losing their jobs or homes, and because of the risk of violence. LGBTIQ+ students reported discrimination in schools and universities. Healthcare professionals reportedly continued to deny healthcare services to LGBTIQ+ individuals because of intolerance and prejudice. The LGBT Network, a Russian NGO, reported that LGBTIQ+ individuals seeking healthcare often experienced strong negative reactions and the assumption that they were mentally ill. The scale at which this took place is not known. There were also reports that LGBTIQ+ individuals faced discrimination in terms of parental rights.¹⁶⁹ In light of the situation described above, people have been reported to see no way out other than denial of their sexual orientation or gender identity, emigration or, in some

¹⁶⁴ DW, [What's behind Russia's plan to ban 'child-free' ideology?](#), 28 September 2024;

¹⁶⁵ IStories, [The Traitors, The Spies, The Terrorists](#), 18 October 2024; confidential source dated 18 September 2024.

¹⁶⁶ See the Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation, March 2023, p. 23 ff. As of December 2022, not only LGBTIQ+-related expressions towards minors were subject to administrative fines, but also expressions visible to anyone.

¹⁶⁷ Citizens' Watch and Sphere, [Judicial harassment against LGBT+ under the 'propaganda' law in Russia](#), August 2024, p. 22.

¹⁶⁸ US Department of State, Human Rights Report 2023 on Russia.

¹⁶⁹ US Department of State, Human Rights Report 2023 on Russia.

cases, even suicide.¹⁷⁰ Statistics on mental health complaints and suicide were not available.

Conversion therapy

So-called 'conversion therapy', which requires LGBTIQ+ people to be 'cured' of their sexual orientation or gender identity, was offered in an increasing number of clinics in Russia. In at least twelve institutions and private practices, registered doctors and psychotherapists offered conversion-therapy services, as did self-appointed therapists, religious healers and hypnotists. Most of the individuals concerned had been reported for such therapies by relatives and had participated under family pressure. Such treatment could range from a series of conversations to forced medication, assault and, in some cases, even so-called 'corrective rape'.¹⁷¹ In cases of forced admission to a psychiatric hospital, people could also be declared legally incapacitated.¹⁷²

Forced psychiatric treatment

In an NGO survey of 4,701 members of the LGBTIQ+ community, about 1% reported having been admitted to psychiatric care homes against their will, or locked in a cell with or without a court conviction.¹⁷³

2.1 Intersex people

The category of intersex people has a different position in Russian society than LGBTQ+ people do. For example, although gender-affirming operations for transgender people were banned from July 2023 (see 2.5), doctors were still allowed to perform gender-affirming surgery on intersex people. This was limited to treatments of babies or children to confirm the gender assigned at birth. Gender assignment was done in Russia immediately at birth according to the assessment of the attending doctor, often without consulting the parents. In some cases, this had the consequence that, later in life, this gender did not correspond to the gender to which these people felt they belonged.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, the broader society had little knowledge about intersex people, and they were not seen in the same way as LGBTQ+ people, who are often portrayed as having had a 'poor upbringing' or having made an 'amoral choice'. Intersex people were largely seen as having an unknown medical condition belonging in the private sphere and treated as confidential. Being intersex thus did not affect their position in society. It is important to note, however, that this is quite different for intersex people with a sexual orientation 'other' than heterosexual, or intersex people who struggle with their gender identity as a result of being assigned the wrong sex at birth.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024; confidential source dated 8 October 2024g; The Guardian, *Russian Duma passes draft law banning gender change*, 15 July 2023.

¹⁷¹ Sphere, *Mental health and human rights in Russia*, 10 October 2024, p. 7; Current Time, *A journalistic investigation has captured for the first time sessions of conversion therapy for LGBTQ people in Russia*, 4 March 2024 (RU);

¹⁷² Sphere: *Mental health and human rights in Russia: LGBT+ perspective (spherequeer.org)*, 10 October 2024. A description of the daily life of transgender people in Russia is presented in: Center T, *Coming out in Russia*, 11 October 2023.

¹⁷³ Coming Out and Sphere, *LGBT+ Community in Russia in 2023*, p. 52.

¹⁷⁴ HRW, *Russia: Trans Health Care, Families Bill Violates Rights*, 15 July 2023; confidential source dated 23 October 2024; confidential source dated 10 February 2025.

¹⁷⁵ Confidential source dated 20 September 2024; confidential source dated 10 February 2025.

Many intersex people deliberately distance themselves from the LGBTQ+ community, partly for fear of negative perceptions in society (similar to LGBTQ+) and for repression from the authorities. For this reason, Russian NGOs often refer to 'LGBT' or 'LGBTQ+'.¹⁷⁶ In this COI Report, the term LGBTIQ+ is used, given the group of intersex people who are not cis.

2.2 Prosecution for extremism

On 30 November 2023, the Russian Supreme Court referred to an 'international LGBT movement' and labelled it an 'extremist organisation'. On 1 March 2024, the Ministry of Justice added the 'movement' to the list of extremist organisations. The rainbow was designated an extremist symbol and was therefore banned.¹⁷⁷ Given that no such international organisation exists, there is no definition of who the authorities regard as falling into this group. This allows the government to apply anti-extremism laws to any number of people who stand for LGBTIQ+ rights, who are not heterosexual, who struggle with their sexual identity or who express solidarity with LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁷⁸

The Supreme Court ruling was confidential, but it was later published by media outlets.¹⁷⁹

In contrast to anti-terrorism legislation, the anti-extremism legislation described below only criminalises actions. Strictly according to the law, therefore, having an LGBTIQ+ orientation or identity in itself – and thus stated membership of the 'international LGBT movement' without engaging in any activities associated with it – is not subject to penalty.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, anti-extremism legislation in general was often applied arbitrarily and interpreted broadly by the Russian authorities.¹⁸¹ Russian regulations lack a clear definition of extremism and terrorism. The broad wording of anti-extremism legislation and the unclear delineation of a so-called 'LGBT movement' encouraged arbitrary application. For LGBTIQ+ people, therefore, it is not clear exactly who is at risk of criminal prosecution. In addition to possible criminal charges, the designation as an extremist group also has social implications for LGBTIQ+ people, even if they do not actively advocate for the interests of LGBTIQ+ people (see 2.4).

2.2.1 Legislation – Criminal offences and administrative offences

¹⁷⁶ Confidential source dated 10 February 2025.

¹⁷⁷ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 10; SOVA Center, [Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2023](#), 2 May 2024.

¹⁷⁸ HRW, Russia: [First Convictions Under LGBT 'Extremist' Ruling](#), 15 February 2024; confidential source dated 6 February 2025.

¹⁷⁹ Svobodnye Novosti, [Destruction of Traditional Values and Feminities](#), 18 January 2024 (RU);

¹⁸⁰ See also Article 205 PC and examples of criminal prosecution of Hizb-ut Tahrir followers under anti-terrorism laws without having engaged in any activities. See McNeil-Willson, R. 2022, [Resilience against counterterrorism? The repression and response of Crimean Muslim activism against Russian counterterrorism and counter-extremism](#). *Intersections*. East European Journal of Society and Politics. 7, 4 (Jan. 2022), 154–173; confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

¹⁸¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 91.

The aforementioned extremism legislation nevertheless contains no clear definition of extremist crimes or administrative offences. Even before the reporting period, this had led to arbitrary interpretation and arbitrary criminal or administrative prosecution in Russia of groups including anti-war activists, political opposition and others who expressed critical views. Authorities had already been using anti-extremism legislation to silence critical voices for a long time.¹⁸²

The Penal Code provided for the punishment of extremist crimes under several articles, including:

- Article 280: Public incitement to extremist activities, maximum penalty – five years' detention
- Article 282.1: Organisation of an extremist community, maximum penalty – eight years' detention
- Article 282.2: Organisation of extremist activities, maximum penalty – ten years' detention

The Administrative Offences Code described the following 'extremist' offences, punishable by up to 15 days of administrative detention or various fines:

- Article 20.3: Distribution and public display of attributes or symbols of extremist organisations
- Article 20.29: Production and distribution of extremist material¹⁸³

A second violation of these articles could be tried under criminal law and punished with up to four years in prison.¹⁸⁴

According to a well-known law firm, the following acts are punishable under either criminal or administrative law:

- continued participation in the activities of the 'extremist' organisation;
- organising its activities, including organising events;
- displaying and spreading 'extremist' symbols (for example, the rainbow);
- involving other individuals in the organisation's activities;
- funding of the organisation (including donations);
- calling for participation in LGBT activism.¹⁸⁵

In addition to the penalties listed above, the authorities may enter individuals suspected of active involvement in an extremist organisation¹⁸⁶ into the national 'list of extremists'¹⁸⁷ without a court order, at the request of the public prosecutor, the

¹⁸² UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 10; SOVA Center, *Freedom of Expression in Russia. SOVA Center's statement* at Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, 8 October 2024; Amnesty International, *Russia: Surge in abuse of anti-terrorism laws to suppress dissent*, 19 February 2024; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation* March 2023.

¹⁸³ RBC, *The Supreme Court has declared the LGBT movement extremist. What does this mean?*, 30 November 2023.

¹⁸⁴ HRW, *Russia: Supreme Court Bans 'LGBT Movement' as 'Extremist'*, 30 November 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Department One, *How to protect yourself*, consulted on 25 October 2024 (RU).

¹⁸⁶ See 'List of public associations and religious organizations for which a court has issued a final decision on liquidation or prohibition of activities based on the grounds provided by the Federal Law of 25 July 2002 № 114-FZ 'On Counteracting Extremist Activities' <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/7822/> (accessible from the Netherlands with VPN).

NOTE: This list might not be exhaustive, and other lists might exist.

¹⁸⁷ See <https://www.fedsfm.ru/documents/terrorists-catalog-portal-act> (accessible from the Netherlands with VPN); see also the Telegram channel [bad list updates](#), consulted on 6 February 2025; <https://extrem.ishukshin.ru/>; confidential source dated 6 February 2025.

NOTE: This list might not be exhaustive, and other lists might exist.

Investigative Committee, the police, the FSB or the Ministry of Justice. As a result, their bank balances will be frozen, they will no longer be allowed to receive government funds (such as benefits, subsidies or pensions) and they will be allowed to spend only 10,000 roubles a month.¹⁸⁸ These measures also apply in other member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Belarus. In August 2024, 611 organisations and 15,339 people were on this list, including 52 minors, with the youngest being 14 years of age. People deemed to be involved in an extremist organisation are prohibited from running for public office.¹⁸⁹

2.2.2 *Consequences of the ruling – Criminal prosecution*

The consequences of the designation as an 'extremist organisation' have thus far manifested themselves at several levels. There was no large-scale criminal prosecution of LGBTIQ+ people under extremism laws during the reporting period. Nevertheless, twelve criminal cases were initiated against LGBTIQ+ people under Article 282.2 for alleged extremist activities of the 'international LGBT movement', including one for alleged LGBT activism.¹⁹⁰ Dozens of police raids followed at nightclubs and private parties throughout Russia (see below and 2.2.3 – Administrative prosecution).

During the reporting period, police conducted dozens of heavy-handed raids on LGBTIQ+ entertainment venues across Russia. Several such raids followed in early December 2023, only a few days after the Supreme Court ruling. Because the Supreme Court ruling did not come into effect until late December 2023, these raids took place under the guise of a drug audit.¹⁹¹ In the most famous case, police collaborated with the Presidential Guard (*Rosgvardiya*) to interrupt a drag show in Orenburg, southwest Russia in March 2024, forcibly detaining visitors and performers in the club. A local nationalist group had reported the drag show, participated in the police action and later posted video footage of it online. According to media reports, some visitors were required to state their names and addresses on camera, and others had their identity documents photographed. They were then free to go. Two employees of the nightclub were arrested on suspicion of founding an extremist organisation, and the owner of the nightclub was later arrested as well. These criminal cases were still pending during the reporting period.¹⁹²

On 29 May 2024 in Samara, as part of a criminal investigation on suspicion of extremism, a search was conducted at the home of Artyom Fokin, the president of Irida, an LGBTIQ+ organisation that had previously been designated as a foreign agent.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Confidential source dated 6 February 2025; Meduza, [A programmer from Gelendzhik shared a link to his website, which monitors updates to the list of 'extremists'](#), 11 August 2018.

¹⁸⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 10; HRW, [Russia: Supreme Court Bans 'LGBT Movement' as 'Extremist'](#), 30 November 2023.

¹⁹⁰ OVD-Info, [Repression in Russia in 2024](#), 10 January 2025.

¹⁹¹ Deutsche Welle, [Russian police raid Moscow gay clubs](#), 2 December 2023.

¹⁹² Amnesty International, [Officials target drag show in first-ever LGBTI-related 'extremism' case](#), 19 March 2024; Mediazona, [Russia's pioneering 'LGBT extremism' case](#), 5 April 2024; Meduza, [We know all of you now](#), 27 January 2025 (RU).

¹⁹³ SOVA Center, [Misuse of Extremism in May 2024](#), 25 June 2024; [Novaya Gazeta, Head of Russian LGBT group detained for leading an 'extremist organisation'](#), 29 May 2024.

Andrey Kotov, a travel agent who offered trips for gay men, was violently arrested overnight in his home on suspicion of organising an extremist community. According to the indictment, he had organised trips even after the Supreme Court ruling.¹⁹⁴ Kotov died in detention, a month after his arrest. According to authorities, he had committed suicide. Human rights defenders questioned this account. Kotov had previously reported assault during his detention.¹⁹⁵

Donations to or collaboration with LGBTIQ+ organisations could be grounds for criminal prosecution.¹⁹⁶ As far as is known, there were no examples of this during the reporting period.

2.2.3

Consequences of the ruling – Administrative prosecution

The independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta Europe* reported that police raids 'to protect traditional values' had already increased since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, since the Supreme Court ruling, police had directed even more negative police attention to LGBTIQ+ events. *Novaya Gazeta Europe* counted 149 such raids since February 2022, 40% of which targeted the LGBTIQ+ community or sexually oriented events. In most cases, this was limited to questioning visitors, recording their details or administrative penalties (see below); owners, staff or organisers risked criminal prosecution (see 2.2.2).¹⁹⁷ The newspaper also cites a case in which bartenders at a striptease contest in Belogorsk were forced to sign a military contract to fight in Ukraine,¹⁹⁸ as also occurred in another police raid in Moscow.¹⁹⁹

The above-mentioned raids on LGBTIQ+-related entertainment venues or organisations resulted in the administrative prosecution of visitors. Police also carried out raids and house searches in Moscow in late November 2024. Several LGBTIQ+ entertainment venues were searched, with attendees forced to lie down on the ground and searched. They were detained for hours, and dozens of them were arrested. Phones, laptops and cameras were seized in search of indications of 'LGBT propaganda'. Seven individuals were given administrative detention of twelve to fifteen days. Several others received penalties for hooliganism. Summonses for military service were also served.²⁰⁰

Because the Supreme Court had also declared the rainbow flag a banned symbol, the display of a rainbow became the basis for administrative sanctions in a number of administrative court cases. In late January 2024, a court in Nizhny Novgorod sentenced a woman to five days of administrative detention for wearing rainbow-

¹⁹⁴ Novaya Gazeta Europe, [Moscow travel agent remanded in custody for catering to queer clients](#), 2 December 2024; Novaya Gazeta, [Moscow queer venues raided on first anniversary of LGBT 'extremism' ruling](#), 30 November 2024.

¹⁹⁵ Meduza, [A Russia travel agent accused of organizing LGBTQ tours died in a Moscow jail](#), 2 January 2025; DW, [Russia: Man accused of organizing LGBTQ+ tours dies in jail](#), 29 December 2024.

¹⁹⁶ Department One, [Is it dangerous to help people who have been listed as 'extremists' or 'terrorists'?](#), consulted on 23 December 2024.

¹⁹⁷ NBC News, [A dozen Moscow clubgoers found guilty after anti-LGBTQ 'propaganda' raids](#), 3 December 2024.

¹⁹⁸ Novaya Gazeta Europe, [Party crashers](#), 20 November 2024.

¹⁹⁹

²⁰⁰ NBC News, [A dozen Moscow clubgoers found guilty after anti-LGBTQ 'propaganda' raids](#), 3 December 2024; Mediazona, [Moscow court arrests seven more Mutabor club visitors after police raid 'in fight against LGBT propaganda'](#), 3 December 2024 (RU); Verstka, [Security forces raid Mono and former Mutabor](#), 30 November 2024 (RU).

coloured earrings in a café. In the same month, a judge in the Volgograd region imposed a fine for posting a rainbow flag on social media. In early February 2024, a Saratov court fined a woman for posting a rainbow flag on social media.²⁰¹ In each of the following months, several people across Russia were fined.²⁰² In all, by September 2024, around thirty people had been fined for using extremist symbols (Article 20.3 CAO) and, in some cases, administrative detention.²⁰³ Throughout 2024, 57 cases had been initiated under Article 20.3 in relation to LGBTIQ+ symbols.²⁰⁴ Nothing is known about criminal cases for displaying LGBTIQ+ symbols.²⁰⁵

People who do not personally belong to the LGBTIQ+ community could also be fined under administrative law for displaying LGBTIQ+-related content, and a second offence could be tried under criminal law. For example, the Tverskoy District Court in Moscow imposed a fine on Alexandra Marova, a member of the regional headquarters of the AI-Russian People's Front (*Obshcherossiyskiy Narodnyy Front*, ONF) and the co-founder of the 'Defenders of Childhood' foundation (*Zaschitniki Detstva*), for an amount equivalent to 29 euros²⁰⁶ on grounds of Article 20.29 CAO²⁰⁷ for the widespread distribution of extremist material. She had shared a message on her Telegram channel in March 2024, the day after the terrorist attack on the Crocus music palace in the Moscow region. The message listed contacts of organisations that could offer free psychological help to victims, including a helpline and a link to the chat line of the Russian NGO LGBT Network. During the trial, Marova stressed that she had not personally posted this list on the internet, but that she had merely shared it without noting the Russian LGBT Network's contacts.²⁰⁸

2.2.4 *Consequences of the ruling – Self-censorship*

Fearing prosecution, people from the LGBTIQ+ community – both organisations and individuals – increasingly applied self-censorship. At least three organisations were forced to close their doors for fear of repercussions under the aforementioned legislation.²⁰⁹ Several other organisations were still able to offer mental health to people needing it, albeit under a banner other than LGBTIQ+, but they nevertheless had to fear infiltration and reporting to the police. For this reason, they operated completely out of the public eye.²¹⁰ This prevented the community from finding, meeting and supporting each other, other than in private venues. According to the source, this made young LGBTIQ+ people particularly vulnerable to psychological suffering.²¹¹

2.3 **Anti-propaganda Law of December 2022**

The designation of LGBTIQ+ groups as extremist organisations had already been preceded by years of ever-increasing marginalisation, due in part to the 'Anti-

²⁰¹ HRW, Russia: [First Convictions Under LGBT 'Extremist' Ruling](#), 15 February 2024.

²⁰² SOVA Center, *Misuse of Extremism in May 2024*, 25 June 2024;

²⁰³ BAMF, [Länderkurzinformation Russische Föderation SOGI](#), October 2024.

²⁰⁴ OVD-Info, [Repression in Russia in 2024: OVD-Info Overview](#), 12 January 2025.

²⁰⁵ Confidential source dated 11 February 2025.¹

²⁰⁶ 3,000 roubles; conversion through xe.com, dated 22 October 2024.

²⁰⁷ Code of Administrative Offences

²⁰⁸ SOVA Center, [Misuse of Anti-Extremism in July 2024](#), 9 September 2024.

²⁰⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 10;

²¹⁰ Confidential source dated 18 September 2024; confidential source dated 14 January 2025.

²¹¹ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024.

propaganda Law' – a phased ban on positive or neutral mention of LGBTIQ+-related content. Beginning in 2006, several Russian regions began introducing bans on 'LGBT propaganda' aimed at minors. In 2013, at the federal level, a ban on the dissemination of information about 'non-traditional relationships' aimed at minors was included in the administrative law.²¹² In the following year, the Russian Supreme Court explained that it was exclusively concerned with the positive propagation of LGBT-related expressions, amongst others, which constituted 'harmful information' for the mental and moral development of children. There was thus still room for doctors, psychologists and NGOs to provide children and adults with information and support.²¹³

In December 2022, the target group supposedly protected by the anti-propaganda law was legally extended to include all adults and children. The law thus includes the propagation of any LGBT-related expression – positive or neutral – as an administrative offence (see also the examples in [2.3.1](#)). Violations are subject to high administrative fines: The minimum fine for individuals under both articles ranges from 50,000 to 100,000 roubles;²¹⁴ for civil servants from 100,000 to 200,000 roubles;²¹⁵ and for legal entities from 800,000 to 1,000,000 roubles²¹⁶. If there are aggravating circumstances – such as 'propaganda' amongst minors (Article 6.21 part 2) or dissemination on the internet (Article 6.21.2 part 1) – the amount of the fine increases. The maximum possible fine (Article 6.21 part 4) – 'propaganda' amongst minors in the media and/or the internet) is 5,000,000 roubles²¹⁷ for legal entities and 400,000 roubles²¹⁸ for individuals. A conviction does not require proof of any actual effects of the expression.²¹⁹

As was the case with prosecution under extremism laws, large-scale fines under the 'Anti-propaganda Law' also failed to materialise during the reporting period (see the figures below). The propaganda law nevertheless has a clear signal effect, as does the designation of groups as 'extremist organisations' (see [2.2](#)): LGBTIQ+ groups are labelled as illegal, with legal and social consequences (see [2.4](#)).

The following figures are indicative, as not all court cases were publicly accessible. In the period 2013–2021, there were 117 administrative known cases, with only 36 convictions under the ban.²²⁰ Between December 2022 and March 2024, NGOs recorded 64 convictions for the various administrative offences under the Anti-

²¹² Law № 135-FZ introduced Article 6.21 CAO.

²¹³ Citizens' Watch and Sphere, [Judicial harassment against LGBT+ under the 'propaganda' law in Russia](#), August 2024; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 23.

²¹⁴ Equivalent to 474 and 948 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²¹⁵ Equivalent to 948 and 1,898 euros, respectively according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²¹⁶ Equivalent to 7,594 and 9,493 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²¹⁷ Equivalent to 47,458 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²¹⁸ Equivalent to 3,796 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²¹⁹ Citizens' Watch and Sphere, [Judicial harassment against LGBT+ under the 'propaganda' law in Russia](#), August 2024; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 23.

²²⁰ Sergey Katsuba (2024), [The Decade of Violence: A Comprehensive Analysis of Hate Crimes Against LGBTQ in Russia in the Era of the 'Gay Propaganda Law' \(2010–2020\)](#), Victims & Offenders, 19:3, pp. 395–418, DOI: 10.1080/15564886.2023.2167142; The Moscow Times, [How Russia's 2013 'Gay Propaganda' Law Catalyzed a Decade of Anti-LGBTQ+ Violence](#), 26 December 2023.

propaganda Law, the vast majority of which were for expressions on social media. In most cases (48 of 64), a fine was imposed. In addition, the residence permits of eight foreign nationals were also revoked.²²¹ From January to June 2024, 133 administrative cases of 'LGBT propaganda' were taken to court. Throughout 2023, there were around 200 – nine times more than in 2022, according to independent medium IStories.²²²

2.3.1 Examples

On 4 May 2024, a Moscow court imposed a fine for spreading 'LGBT propaganda' equivalent to 960 euros²²³ to Yan Dvorkin, the leader of the Center T Group, an NGO that assisted transgender and non-binary people. Dvorkin was also subsequently reported by Moscow's child protection service, which was monitoring Dvorkin's adopted child, and accused of 'LGBT propaganda' as, according to them, he posted online about his relationship with his partner.²²⁴

Haoyang Xu and his partner Gela Gogishvili were arrested and fined in Kazan in March 2023 for spreading 'LGBT propaganda' on social media. They had reported on their daily life in Russia. The couple had previously received online hate and death threats after the well-known anti-LGBT activist Timur Bulatov had called for this. Their videos had also been reported to the police, whereupon the police started searching for them in Kazan. Eventually, Xu and Gogishvili were arrested, and Xu was placed in immigration detention for several days. They were both fined, and Xu's residence permit was revoked. The couple left Russia and continued to receive threats.²²⁵

In one case, charges of Satanism followed. In October 2024, Ilya Zhuravlyov, the director of two medical centres in the Ulyanovsk region, was accused by the FSB of promoting Satanism as part of a wider campaign to spread 'LGBT propaganda'. Zhuravlyov was arrested possibly because of his homosexuality under suspicion of extremism, but he was later also charged with Satanism.²²⁶

2.4 Impact of legislation in society

In addition to judicial prosecution, the Anti-propaganda Law and the designation of LGBTIQ+ groups as extremist organisations has also led to other, non-legal consequences in society. The main consequence has been the further marginalisation and fragmentation of the LGBTIQ+ community, which has reduced the ability of members to find and support each other. It has also made

²²¹ Citizens' Watch and Sphere, [Judicial harassment against LGBT+ under the 'propaganda' law in Russia](#), August 2024.

²²² IStories, [Traitors, spies, terrorists](#), 18 October 2024.

²²³ 100,000 roubles; conversion through xe.com, dated 22 October 2024.

²²⁴ RFERL, [Noted Russian LGBT activist fined for 'gay propaganda'](#), 4 March 2023; Frontline Defenders, [Human Rights defender Yan Dvorkin fined RUR 100,000 under 'LGBT propaganda' Law](#), 9 March 2023.

²²⁵ Telegram channel [Chinaza and Gruueza](#), consulted on 17 January 2025; RFERL, ['They're hunting us'](#), 25 March 2023 (RU) The Moscow Times, [Russian Court Rules to Deport Chinese LGBT Blogger](#), 6 April 2023.

²²⁶ RFERL, [Russia Accuses Medical Director Of Satanism Amid Crackdown On 'Nontraditional Values'](#), 7 October 2024; Bitter Winter, [Accusations of 'Satanism' Used as a Tool for Anti-LGBT Repression](#), 11 October 2024.

psychological and medical assistance harder to find, and violent crimes motivated by hatred of LGBTIQ+ people have increased.²²⁷

Incidents of violence

Members of the LGBTIQ+ community have become victims of violent crime three times more often since the introduction of the Anti-propaganda Law in 2013 – at least around 140 times annually. A similar increase is feared for the aforementioned tightening of the Anti-propaganda Law and the designation of the community as an extremist movement.²²⁸ Reliable figures on actual numbers of violent incidents against the LGBTIQ+ community were lacking, however, due to under-reporting by victims and the unwillingness of the authorities to pursue criminal charges against perpetrators. According to the NGO LGBT Network, the rate of under-reporting for fear of repression was around 90%. In a representative survey, the NGO Coming Out reported that the increase in hateful government rhetoric against LGBTIQ+ people had not translated into an increase in violent incidents in 2022, but that a clear increase in violent incidents was reported in 2023.²²⁹

Psychological and medical care

Psychological and medical care geared towards the LGBTIQ+ community was virtually unmentionable, and it was therefore virtually impossible to find online. There were still doctors providing medical treatment under the radar, albeit fewer than before. Access to such assistance was limited, however, as it had to be offered out of sight of the authorities. Psychologists fear fines under the propaganda law (see 2.3) or prosecution under the anti-extremism legislation (see 2.2).²³⁰ Information on medical pathways for gender confirmation of transgender people is provided in the next section.

2.5 Transgender people: Prohibition of gender-affirming surgery/modified gender designation

Gender-affirming healthcare has been banned in Russia since 24 July 2023. In addition to gender-affirming surgeries, this new law banned hormone treatments. In addition, it has no longer been possible to change the gender designation in identity documents since July 2023. Previous gender-affirmation surgeries or document adjustments have led to the annulment of marriages for the spouses involved and

²²⁷ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024; confidential source dated 4 October 2024; confidential source dated 18 September 2024; Coming Out and Sphere, [LGBT+ Community in Russia in 2023](#), p. 4; New York Times, [Putin signs a harsh new law targeting transgender people in Russia](#), 24 July 2023.

²²⁸ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024; [New York Times, Putin signs a harsh new law targeting transgender people in Russia](#), 24 July 2023; Sergey Katsuba (2024), [The Decade of Violence: A Comprehensive Analysis of Hate Crimes Against LGBTQ in Russia in the Era of the 'Gay Propaganda Law' \(2010–2020\)](#), Victims & Offenders, 19:3, pp. 395–418, DOI: 10.1080/15564886.2023.2167142.

²²⁹ Coming Out SPB, [Report on the Life of LGBTIQ+ People in Russia in 2023](#), p. 62.

²³⁰ Sphere, [Mental health and human rights in Russia](#), 10 October 2024, p. 7; Current Time, [A journalistic investigation has captured for the first time sessions of conversion therapy for LGBTQ people in Russia. The main points from the film of the 'System' project](#), 4 March 2024 (RU); confidential source dated 14 January 2025; confidential source dated 18 September 2024.

excluded adoptions or parental authority.²³¹ Between 2016 and 2022, about 2,990 people had their gender designations changed in their identity documents.²³²

Within the LGBTIQ+ community in Russia, transgender people had already been the most vulnerable to discrimination. Before the legal ban on gender-affirming surgery and hormone treatments, the main source of such discrimination had been fellow citizens and employers, according to NGOs, and since the ban, it has come especially from medical staff.²³³

Impact on transgender people who have already completed transition

On paper, the new law would purportedly apply only to transgender people who had not completed their transition by July 2023. In practice, however, the law also discriminated against people who had already completed their transition. For example, people who had already changed the gender designation in their identity documents were twice as likely to be denied access to government services. According to two NGOs, examples involved denying these individuals the right to change their first names to gender-neutral names, although the new law did not prohibit this. Individuals who had already completed their transitions also encountered civil servants applying the new law retroactively: there was a refusal to adjust official documents to reflect the already adjusted gender designation in identity documents, even if the courts had confirmed their right to do so.²³⁴ Within this group, there were fears that previous adjustments to gender designations in identity documents (i.e. from before July 2023) would be reversed. To date, however, there are no known cases of this.²³⁵

According to another source, even before the introduction of the law, it was common for civil registrars (ZAGS) to try to convince married couples to divorce or even to automatically dissolve the marriage if one of the spouses wanted to have the gender designation changed. Only after marriage had been terminated was the change of gender designation allowed. In July 2023, the ZAGS in Irkutsk successfully asked the court to dissolve a marriage after one of the spouses had his gender designation changed.²³⁶

Impact on transgender people who have partially completed transition

People who were still in medical transition at the time of the change in the law could no longer claim medical treatment. Medical institutes that had offered such pathways prior to the ban discontinued their services. Some of these doctors were questioned by the police.²³⁷ The purpose of those interrogations was unclear at the time of writing this official report. Due to the attention of the authorities, the level of fear of criminal charges based on possible further medical guidance amongst doctors was high. Individuals who had partially completed their transitions were therefore

²³¹ New York Times, [Putin signs a harsh new law targeting transgender people in Russia](#), 24 July 2023; The Guardian, [Russian Duma passes draft law banning gender change](#), 14 July 2023; HRW, *Russia: Trans Health Care, Families Bill Violates Rights*, 15 July 2023;

²³² HRW, *Russia: Trans Health Care, Families Bill Violates Rights*, 15 July 2023; [BBC, Russian parliament bans gender reassignment surgery for trans people](#), 14 July 2023.

²³³ Coming Out and Sphere, [LGBT+ Community in Russia in 2023](#), p. 5; confidential source dated 8 October 2024.

²³⁴ Coming Out and Sphere, [LGBT+ in Russia 2023](#), short conclusions; confidential source dated 8 October 2024.

²³⁵ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024.

²³⁶ Confidential source dated 23 October 2024).

²³⁷ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024.

forced to self-medicate with illegally obtained hormones, with or without online advice from doctors abroad, with all the medical risks involved. They were no longer eligible for surgery. If they had already completed their social transition, their appearance no longer matched the gender inscription in their documents. They were therefore vulnerable to discrimination by the authorities and by medical staff, especially in state hospitals. According to one source, people in such situations avoided emergency care for fear of transphobic reactions.²³⁸

Transgender people were more cautious about expressing their gender identity in 2023 than they had been in 2022, according to a survey by the NGO Coming Out.²³⁹

Even prior to the introduction of the above law, being transgender was already included in the Russian list of behavioural and personality disorders. Although, in theory, this could lead to the denial of a driving licence, this was rare in practice, according to a source.²⁴⁰

2.6 Regional differences

In Russia, there are large regional differences in the living conditions of LGBTIQ+ people.

According to one source, some smaller LGBTIQ+ NGOs in the regions – outside Russia's major cities – were still able to operate under the radar. Although they had to fear attacks from fellow citizens, the police did not pursue an active investigation policy against them. According to the source, this was related to the limited capacity of the police.²⁴¹

North Caucasus

In the republics of Ingushetia, Dagestan and Chechnya in the North Caucasus, there is a closed, patriarchal society. The heavy repression against LGBTIQ+ people by police and relatives from the North Caucasus was tolerated, or even cooperated with, by authorities in other parts of Russia. For example, LGBTIQ+ people from other parts of Russia were handed over to local Caucasian authorities on the pretext of defending 'traditional values'. This often resulted in violent and sometimes murderous treatment of LGBTIQ+ individuals trying to escape violent relatives or the authorities.²⁴² Conversion therapy was widespread, particularly in Ingushetia and Dagestan²⁴³ (see the introduction to Section 2).

Chechnya

²³⁸ Confidential source dated 18 September 2024.

²³⁹ Coming Out and Sphere, [Report on the Life of LGBTQ+ in Russia 2023](#), p. 15.

²⁴⁰ The transgender diagnosis is assigned the number F64 on the list of disorders (confidential source dated 23 October 2024).

²⁴¹ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024; confidential source dated 18 September 2024.

²⁴² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 93; confidential source dated 4 October 2024; Amnesty International, [Halt returns of people from the North Caucasus to Russia where they are at risk of torture and abuse](#), 17 January 2024. For another example, see also the arrest of Zarema Musaeva by Chechen police in Nizhny Novgorod: The Moscow Times, [Jailed Mother of Kayrov Critic Faces New Charges](#), 11 November 2024; RFERL, [Imprisoned Mother Of Chechen Activists Hospitalized](#), 28 March 2024.

²⁴³ Confidential source dated 20 September 2024.

NGOs and independent media continued to report on a government campaign of violence, torture and disappearances against individuals perceived to be members of the LGBTIQ+ community. According to NGOs and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Russia, there were systematic human rights violations on LGBTIQ+ people in Chechnya. Examples of these human rights violations included murder, family abduction and extortion, violence and disappearances.²⁴⁴ According to one source, although there were fewer cases than there had been in 2017, when Chechen authorities searched for gay men and arrested, abused, tortured and killed several dozen of them, this remains the order of the day. According to this source, the police are still actively searching LGBTIQ+ people through interrogations of LGBTIQ+ people and the forced issuing of contact lists.²⁴⁵

According to human rights organisations, no investigations had been launched into the extrajudicial killings and torture of LGBTQ+ individuals in Chechnya during the reporting period. Moreover, the government denied that any LGBTIQ+ people were living in Chechnya.²⁴⁶ In addition, human rights defenders reported that Chechen gay men are forced to fight in Ukraine.²⁴⁷ In 2023, five gay men in Chechnya were detained on grounds of their sexual orientation, mistreated and forced to sign military contracts, according to one source. According to an eyewitness, more people were detained by police.²⁴⁸

Unlike in other regions (for example, Dagestan or Ingushetia), the Chechen authorities systematically tracked down LGBTIQ+ refugees and forced them to return to Chechnya. At the request of relatives or on the initiative of the authorities themselves, Chechen police circulated arrest warrants throughout Russia, or introduced those involved as missing persons (in most cases, minors) in order to obtain the cooperation of police in other parts of Russia.²⁴⁹ Victims were detained extrajudicially, tortured and some were handed over to their families with a free pass or sometimes even an order from the authorities to commit honour killings.²⁵⁰

Women from Chechnya

The aforementioned cooperation with local or federal authorities in other parts of Russia regarding gay men was also applied to cis-hetero women from Chechnya. The Chechen authorities and relatives received assistance from authorities in other parts of Russia to forcibly bring their relative back to Chechnya. In the case of Liya Zaurbekova, a Chechen woman who had left Russia fleeing domestic violence at the hands of her family, the head of the Chechen Republic, Kadyrov, indicated that he would personally ensure the woman's return. In this case, there were no special ties

²⁴⁴ Coming Out/Sphere, LGBT+ Community in Russia in 2023, p. 6; confidential source dated 20 September 2024; UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 14.

²⁴⁵ Confidential source dated 12 February 2024.

²⁴⁶ US State Department Human Rights Report 2023 on Russia; confidential source dated 20 September 2024; SKSOS, NK SOS Crisis group [Yearly report 2023](#); confidential source dated 12 February 2024.

²⁴⁷ Novaya Gazeta, [Chechen security forces accused of forcing detained gay men to fight in Ukraine](#), 5 September 2024; UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 14; confidential source dated 12 February 2024.

²⁴⁸ Confidential source dated 12 February 2024.

²⁴⁹ Confidential source dated 4 October 2024; Coming Out/Sphere, [LGBT+ Community in Russia in 2023](#), p. 6;

²⁵⁰ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 14; confidential source dated 12 February 2024.

between the woman's family and Kadyrov.²⁵¹ The Chechen Selima Ismailova tried to flee abroad from her violent family, but she was stopped at Vnukovo airport in Moscow.²⁵²

Dagestan and Ingushetia

In other parts of the North Caucasus, LGBTIQ+ individuals were also at risk of assault, abduction and forced 'therapy' in psychiatric clinics or by traditional 'healers'. In Dagestan and Ingushetia, however, NGOs noted that the threat came less from the authorities and more from the family. Relatives often felt that their family honour was injured by LGBTIQ+ orientation or identity, and they tried to persuade the relative in question to 'repent' through threats, violence or conversion therapy. Abductions from other parts of Russia back home were purportedly carried out less through the cooperation of the authorities than by the relatives themselves. The authorities in the other parts of Russia nevertheless would not actively protect the individuals involved from their relatives.²⁵³ This is also evidenced by the case of cis-women. For example, Aishat Magomedova, a woman of Dagestani origin, tried to flee from an abusive marriage via Moscow. She was abducted by relatives to Dagestan in August 2024.²⁵⁴

For security reasons, NGOs assisting with evacuation from the Caucasus could reveal only limited information on examples.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Caucasian Knot, [Escaped Chechen native Zaurbekova frightened by promise of Kadyrov's associates to return her to her family](#), 18 May 2024; The Guardian, ['I did not want to disappear in silence': Chechen woman livestreamed attempted abduction by her family](#), 10 June 2024; confidential source dated 4 October 2024;

²⁵² RFERL, [Woman Fleeing Domestic Violence Missing After Being Forcibly Returned To Chechnya](#), 15 June 2023;

²⁵³ Caucasian Knot, [Human rights defenders report whereabouts of Aishat Magomedova, who escaped from domestic violence](#), 2 August 2024; Coming Out/Sphere, LGBT+ Community in Russia in 2023, p. 6;

²⁵⁴ Caucasian Knot, [Human rights defenders report whereabouts of Aishat Magomedova, who escaped from domestic violence](#), 2 August 2024;

²⁵⁵ SKSOS, [NK SOS Crisis group Yearly report 2023](#);

3 Critics and opponents

The space for critics of government and civil society declined even further during the reporting period. The war in Ukraine significantly accelerated this development and added a number of 'red lines' to the public debate, which when crossed would lead to prosecution. For example, any criticism of the Russian invasion or the actions of Russian forces in Ukraine is out of the question (see [3.7](#)), as is criticism of President Putin himself, and any collaboration with foreign media, governments or other organisations from countries not friendly to Russia. In addition, new 'extremist organisations' were identified, including the non-existent 'international LGBT community' and the 'Anti-Russian Separatist Movement'.²⁵⁶ Ethnic minority organisations were classified as terrorist.²⁵⁷ Dissemination of information about a so-called 'child-free movement'²⁵⁸ was subject to penalty, as was 'LGBT propaganda' (see [2.3.1](#)).²⁵⁹ Prosecution still seems to be a two-stage rocket: first offences are usually addressed with administrative penalties (fines), with second offences leading to criminal prosecution.

Through legislative amendments (see [3.1](#)) social space was further restricted, thereby undermining fundamental human rights and freedoms. Strict action was taken against dissenting opinions on the war against Ukraine in particular; hundreds of people were arrested or imprisoned because of this. Of the 1,422 people in criminal detention for political reasons in December 2024, around half had been detained after the start of the war.²⁶⁰ Prominent opposition leaders (like the late Alexei Navalny, Ilya Yashin and Vladimir Kara-Murza) were given years of prison sentences and imprisoned under appalling conditions.²⁶¹ The result was a climate of fear amongst activists remaining in Russia (for example, fear of losing their jobs or being criminally prosecuted).²⁶² An investigation for PACE describes the repression of anti-war critics as systematic.²⁶³

Detection methods became more sophisticated and intrusive (for example, see social media screening and facial recognition; [3.2](#)).

²⁵⁶ Current Time, [Russia has declared a non-existent organization, the 'Anti-Russian Separatist Movement', to be extremist](#), 7 June 2024 (RU); OMCT, [Russia: Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' and national minorities' rights organisations in the list of 'extremist organisations'](#), 2 August 2024.

²⁵⁷ The Moscow Times, ['Horrific': Russia's Indigenous Activists Decry Sweeping 'Terrorist' Designation](#), 17 January 2025.

²⁵⁸ This 'movement' was said to propagate childlessness, and thus to be at odds with Russian national interest.

²⁵⁹ FIDH, [Ban on 'propaganda' in favor of childfree lifestyles](#), 14 November 2024; Novaya Gazeta, [Putin signs 'child-free propaganda' bill into law](#), 24 November 2024; RFERL, [Russian Government Moves To Stigmatize 'Extremist' Idea Of Not Having Children](#), 7 July 2024.

²⁶⁰ OVD-Info, Dashboard [Criminal repression in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024; OVD-Info applies the following definition: 'Political prisoners are those who are recognized as such by the Memorial organization in accordance with the Guidelines for the Definition of the Concept of "Political Prisoner" based on PACE Resolution No. 1900 (2012)'.

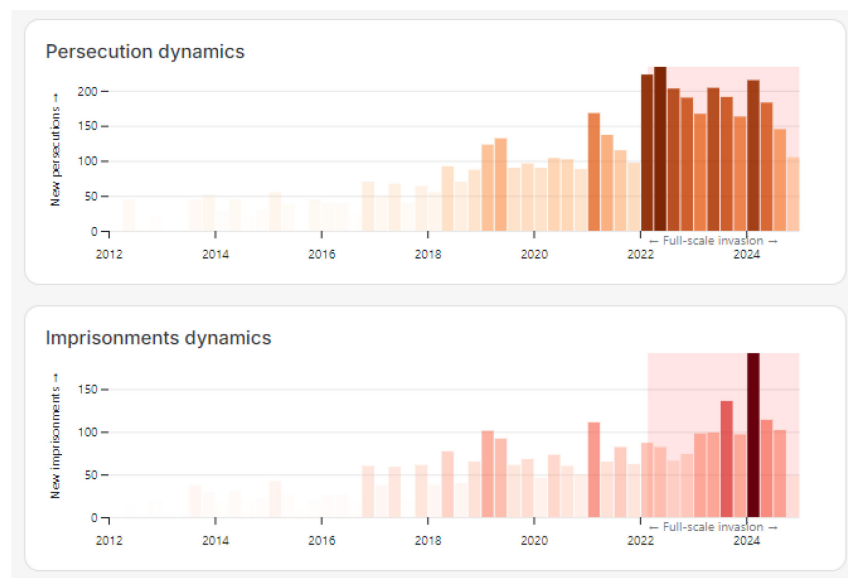
²⁶¹ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024; HRW, [Repressive Laws Used to Crush Civic Freedoms](#), 7 August 2024; confidential source dated 6 June 2023.

²⁶² Confidential source dated 8 October 2024.

²⁶³ PACE, [The arbitrary detention of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the systematic persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus](#), 16 April 2024. The study speaks of both 'persecution' and 'repression'.

The criminal cases that the NGO OVD-Info deems politically motivated are depicted in the charts below. The charts indicate a peak in the number of criminal cases initiated at the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, after which the number continued to fluctuate above pre-invasion levels. The number of criminal cases for anti-war criticism increased in 2023 compared to 2022, with the number of new cases increasing from 378 to 794. By contrast, another decline apparently occurred in 2024.²⁶⁴ According to OVD-Info, this decrease was not due to less critical expression, or less repression from the government, but manifested itself in a different, more sophisticated way: in a few targeted, major criminal cases or by tightening laws and measures. These criminal cases and stricter laws resulted in self-censorship, according to OVD-Info. This reduced the need for large-scale arrests and criminal cases.²⁶⁵ In addition, under-reporting was likely, due to increasingly difficult research conditions (see [3.7.1](#)). Information on the tightening of legislation is provided in [3.1](#).

The dynamics in prosecution in politically motivated cases (all cases involving criticism of the government) are depicted in the charts below. The second chart shows a spike in the number of criminal prison sentences imposed in politically motivated cases in the first quarter of 2024; thereafter, the numbers remained higher than they had been before the Russian invasion. Given that criminal cases can take months or years to resolve, the numbers of cases involving imposed detention respond to current events in a delayed manner.²⁶⁶



Source: OVD-Info, [Dashboard Criminal repression in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024

²⁶⁴ OVD-Info, Dashboard [Criminal repression in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024;

²⁶⁵ OVD-Info, [Repression in Russia in 2023. OVD-Info overview](#), 17 January 2024.

²⁶⁶ OVD-Info, Dashboard [Criminal repression in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024;

3.1 New legislation, tightening of existing legislation and policy

New laws are described below. As in the previous COI Report, it is important to note that in Russia, it is not so much the letter of the law that applies as the policies laid out by the government and that underlie the law (see also the aforementioned 'red lines'). If policies deem certain behaviours or individuals undesirable, enforcement of the law serves to support those policies – and individuals are thus prosecuted even if their behaviour is not strictly covered by these laws. Further information on the functioning of the Russian legal system and the lack of independence of the judiciary is also presented in the previous COI Report.²⁶⁷

Offences committed abroad and the application of Russian laws

One trend in jurisprudence even before the reporting period involved the extraterritorial application of administrative laws (in other words, the application of Russian administrative law to acts committed abroad).

According to Article 1.8 CAO – with some exceptions²⁶⁸ – administrative offences were punishable only if they were committed in Russia. In practice, however, politically sensitive administrative offences were punished even if the acts had taken place abroad, and also if the suspects were still abroad. An October 2024 bill was also intended to legislate this already prevalent practice. Online violations – for example, of the Foreign Agents Act (Article 19.34 CAO) and military censorship (for example, Article 20.3.3 CAO) – were incidentally seen by courts as having been committed in Russia, even if internet censorship prevented the viewing of this online content in Russia.²⁶⁹ Two sources did not expect the bill to pass.²⁷⁰

The presence of the offender is not required for administrative court proceedings. Although an accused in absentia cannot be subject to administrative detention, fining – and, according to the above bill, the administrative confiscation of property – can follow.²⁷¹ The bill had not yet been passed during the reporting period, but it is not expected to change much in practice.²⁷²

The presence of the accused is required for the commencement of criminal court proceedings. Criminal investigations can nevertheless be initiated whilst the suspect is abroad. For example, during the reporting period, the Undesirable Organisations Act was applied to offences committed abroad that would indicate involvement in an undesirable organisation.²⁷³ In November 2024, for example, an arrest warrant was issued against Kirill Martynov, the editor-in-chief of the undesirable newspaper *Novaya Gazeta Europe*, for leading an undesirable organisation. Martynov was

²⁶⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, pp. 84 and 99.

²⁶⁸ Exceptions include Article 20.33 CAO (participation in an organisation that has been declared undesirable); Article 15.27.3 CAO (money laundering for a legal entity); Article 19.28 CAO (illegal payments on behalf of a legal entity). See SOVA, [The Duma introduced a bill on punishment for crimes committed abroad](#), 17 October 2024 (RU); confidential source dated 10 February 2025.

²⁶⁹ Confidential source dated 10 February 2025.

²⁷⁰ Confidential source dated 10 February 2025; confidential source dated 12 February 2025.

²⁷¹ SOVA, [The Duma introduced a bill on punishment for crimes committed abroad](#), 17 October 2024 (RU); confidential source dated 10 February 2025.

²⁷² Confidential source dated 10 February 2025.

²⁷³ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 83.

working from abroad.²⁷⁴ The co-director of the election monitor Golos, Grigory Melkonyants, was arrested in August 2023 on suspicion of collaborating with the *European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations* (ENEMO) from Montenegro, which had been declared undesirable. He risks six years in prison. During the reporting period, he was still in pre-trial detention.²⁷⁵

Confiscation measures

Confiscation measures have already been introduced for numerous other criminal offences since July 2022. Since 14 February 2024, more confiscation measures have been possible in several cases, including established enrichment through dissemination of false information; funds used to incite resistance to state security or to call for the implementation of international sanctions against Russia; or for support to international organisations. More specifically, these confiscation measures have become applicable to allegedly discrediting the military, public incitement of extremism and calls for sanctions against Russia or aiding and abetting their implementation. For example, anyone who supported foreign authorities or international organisations of which Russia is not a member also had to expect that their property and honorary titles would be confiscated in the future.²⁷⁶ The bill was passed unanimously in its third reading on 31 January 2024, and it was signed by President Putin on 14 February 2024.²⁷⁷ Legal experts pointed out that the law concerned only the confiscation of property obtained through the alleged offence. Although the application of the law has yet to be seen, their expectation was that the imposition of fines would be easier than confiscation proceedings.²⁷⁸

See also [1.3](#) for information on the application of this law to contract soldiers, reservists and conscripts refusing to fight.

Confiscation measures apply if there is a conviction for the following offences:²⁷⁹

- Assisting in the implementation of decisions of international organisations in which the Russian Federation does not participate, or of foreign state bodies (Article 284.3 PC).
- Illegal crossing of Russian Federation state border (Article 322 PC).
- Organisation of illegal migration (Article 322.1 PC).
- Unlawful modification of the Russian Federation state border (Article 323 PC).

²⁷⁴ Novaya Gazeta Europe, [Russian court arrests Novaya Gazeta Europe editor-in-chief in absentia for running 'undesirable' organization](#), 7 November 2024; Meduza, [Russia orders arrest of journalist in first felony prosecution of an 'undesirable' media outlet's editor-in-chief](#), 7 November 2024.

²⁷⁵ Politico, [Russia arrests head of election watchdog, shuts human rights group](#), 18 August 2023; Frontline Defenders, [Grigory Melkonyants](#), consulted on 7 February 2025.

²⁷⁶ Die Zeit, [Russisches Parlament will Kriegsgegner enteignen lassen](#), 31 January 2024; Meduza, [Putin signs law enabling asset seizure for convictions related to desertion, genocide, and 'fake news' about army](#), 14 February 2024; BNR, [Kremlin jaagt op kritische Russen in het buitenland](#), 2 February 2024.

²⁷⁷ Law 533912-8 of 14 February 2022; Meduza, [Putin signs law enabling asset seizure for convictions related to desertion, genocide, and 'fake news' about army](#), 14 February 2024.

²⁷⁸ Telegram NetFreedomsProject, [message 965](#), 15 January 2024 (RU). Other offences that could be subject to confiscation include: online crimes (Articles 272, 273, 274 and 274.1 PC), sabotage (Article 281 PC), illegal harvesting of endangered species of plants (Article 260 PC), covert cooperation with foreign powers (Article 275 PC) and sharing state secrets (Article 283 PC).

²⁷⁹ Meduza, [Putin signs law enabling asset seizure for convictions related to desertion, genocide, and 'fake news' about army](#), 14 February 2024;

- Non-compliance with orders (Article 332 PC).
- Desertion (Article 338 PC).
- Use of prohibited means and methods of warfare (Article 356 PC).
- Plundering (Article 356.1 PC).
- Genocide (Article 357 PC).

Restriction on property transactions and blocking accounts

As of 1 June 2025, a ban on property transactions will apply to people convicted of a crime, including spreading fake news about the Russian armed forces (Article 207.3 PC) or repeatedly discrediting the armed forces (Article 280.3 PC). These restrictions are lifted over time.²⁸⁰ See also 3.7 (Criticising the war).

Foreign Agent Law

One of the key pieces of legislation that suppressed civil society activities was the Foreign Agent Law. Passed in 2012 to restrict organisations and individuals under foreign influence in their activities, this law has since been continuously amended and its scope broadened. During the reporting period, almost every Russian and foreign socially active organisation or individual with links to foreign countries – those with visible profiles, as well as less visible actors – could be identified²⁸¹ as ‘foreign agents’ or as ‘affiliated with a foreign agent’. Foreign agents face a high regulatory burden and risk administrative and eventually criminal proceedings if rules are violated (see previous COI Report).²⁸² For them, therefore, participation in social and political life was drastically reduced. Both organisations and individuals found it much more difficult to continue their work in Russia due to the strict restrictions and high regulatory burden.²⁸³

In July and August 2024, legislative changes were introduced that made cooperation with ‘foreign agents’ a criminal offence. This isolated both organisations and individuals classified as foreign agents – mostly journalists and activists – from colleagues, employers, advertisers, lessors, donors or online followers. Any kind of connection with a foreign agent can lead to administrative sanctions under the new legislation (e.g. warning and high fines).²⁸⁴ Ignoring a warning resulted in the increase of a fine imposed later, from 30,000 to 50,000 roubles²⁸⁵ for individuals, 70,000 to 100,000 roubles²⁸⁶ for civil servants or managers of organisations, or a

²⁸⁰ Network Freedoms Telegram message dated 13 December 2024, No. [1127](#). The restrictions are lifted if criminal charges are dropped, and in the case of conviction after 1 to 10 years, depending on the severity of the sentence imposed.

²⁸¹ In late January 2025, the list had more than 900 names. The list is available at <https://minjust.gov.ru/uploaded/files/reestr-inostrannyih-agentov-17012025.pdf>.

²⁸² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 93.

²⁸³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 93; confidential source dated 14 January 2025; Novaya Gazeta, [Enemies of the State](#), 23 January 2025.

²⁸⁴ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 79; Novaya Gazeta, [Enemies of the State](#), 23 January 2025.

²⁸⁵ Equivalent to 284 and 474 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²⁸⁶ Equivalent to 664 and 949 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

ban on work activities for up to two years, and 200,000 to 300,000 roubles²⁸⁷ for organisations.²⁸⁸ In addition, foreign agents may not stand for election.²⁸⁹

Almost all NGOs and media in Russia with links to foreign countries have now been designated as foreign agents. Examples of journalists and media designated as 'foreign agents' are described in [3.6](#), with examples of activists in [3.3](#) and examples of soldiers' relatives in [3.7.6](#).

Undesirable foreign organisations

Whereas Russian organisations can be classified as 'foreign agents', foreign organisations can be classified as 'undesirable organisation'. For example, the 2015 Undesirable Foreign and International Organisations Act can prohibit foreign and international non-profit organisations from carrying out activities in Russia, and it can freeze their bank assets if they pose a threat to the security, defence or constitution of Russia. The law has therefore proven an effective means of silencing, financially draining and isolating organisations, groups or individuals from others, as any kind of collaboration or donation was punishable. In addition, this law has served to curtail freedom of expression by criminalising references to these organisations, both online and offline. These provisions have applied to Russians and Russian organisations both inside and outside Russia. Additional information is provided in the previous COI Report.²⁹⁰

The involvement of people in 'undesirable organisations' became even easier to prosecute during the reporting period. This had previously required a conviction under administrative law. Since August 2023, however, criminal prosecution can also take place if the person concerned has an administrative law conviction for alleged involvement in an 'unregistered organisation' (see below). The definition of 'undesirable organisations' was expanded to include any type of organisation funded by or cooperating with foreign governments, excluding international organisations of which Russia is a member.²⁹¹

Examples of prosecution are described above, under the heading 'Offences committed abroad' at the beginning of [3.1](#).

Registration required for activities in Russia

Since 31 July 2023, only organisations with an establishment in Russia have been able to conduct activities in Russia. Those not complying with this new law risked administrative prosecution and fines of 3,000 to 5,000 roubles²⁹² for individuals, 20,000 to 50,000 roubles²⁹³ for people in leadership positions or public servants,

²⁸⁷ Equivalent to 1,898 and 2,847 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²⁸⁸ Federal Law № 364-FZ of July 24, 2023; HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 80.

²⁸⁹ Meduza, [Russia Moves to Ban 'Foreign Agents' From Running for Political Office](#), 6 May 2024.

²⁹⁰ HRW, ['Undesirable' In Russia: What Does The Label Mean And What Are The Consequences?](#), 20 February 2024; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 95.

²⁹¹ DW, [Russia tightens 'undesirable organizations' law](#), 27 July 2024; HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 180.

²⁹² Equivalent to 28 and 47 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²⁹³ Equivalent to 189 and 474 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

50,000 to 100,000 roubles²⁹⁴ for legal persons, and deportation combined with an entry ban for foreign offenders. Criminal prosecution and a maximum sentence of up to two years' detention for non-registration in Russia was also possible if the person concerned already had a previous administrative conviction for participating in an undesirable organisation, or in case of a third such violation of the mandatory establishment in Russia within two years. This calculation included offences relating to banned organisations. Conversely, offences relating to undesirable organisations were also counted in convictions for involvement in unregistered organisations. For organisers of such unregistered activities, a first offence was sufficient for prosecution under the criminal law and punishable with up to three years' detention.²⁹⁵

Curtailement of eligibility

Before the reporting period, people with alleged involvement in an extremist organisation or a conviction for such involvement had already been prohibited from standing for election to Federation Council as long as the allegation applied or, after conviction, as long as their criminal record had not lapsed under the statute of limitations. Five more years were added at the end of May 2023: candidates were barred from elections to the Federation Council for the duration of five years after their criminal records for involvement in extremist organisations had lapsed. Campaign material that may have related to extremism was also excluded.²⁹⁶ Information on the designation of Navalny's organisations as extremist, as well as on his conviction for extremism is presented in [3.3.1](#).

Criticism of the war

Laws designed to counter criticism of the war were not changed during this reporting period, but the maximum sentences were increased. For two of the three offences listed below – openly discrediting the Russian armed forces and calling for sanctions – a first administrative conviction was a precondition for criminal prosecution; legal persons could be prosecuted only administratively.²⁹⁷

- Article 207.3 PC, public dissemination of '**false information**' about the Russian armed forces and other parts of the Russian government active abroad,²⁹⁸ with fines and up to three years' detention, with up to ten years in case of aggravating circumstances or up to fifteen years in case of serious consequences;²⁹⁹
- Article 280.3 PC, openly '**discrediting**' Russian armed forces and other parts of the Russian government active abroad³⁰⁰: criminal prosecution was possible after one administrative conviction within the previous year for the corresponding administrative offence (Article 20.3.3 CAO). Administrative

²⁹⁴ Equivalent to 28 and 47 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

²⁹⁵ Federal Law № 409-FZ dated 31 July 2023; Federal Law № 412-FZ 4 August 2023; Federal Law № 413-FZ 4 August 2023; HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 81.

²⁹⁶ Federal Law № [184-FZ](#) of 29 May 2023; HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 96.

²⁹⁷ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 141.

²⁹⁸ For example, this includes embassies, the Presidential Guard (Rosgvardiya) and, since 1 March 2023, contract soldiers ('volunteers').

²⁹⁹ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 137.

³⁰⁰ For example, this includes embassies, the Presidential Guard (Rosgvardiya), and, since 1 March 2023, contract soldiers ('volunteers').

penalties ranged between 30,000 and 50,000 roubles;³⁰¹ for supervisors and civil servants, the range was 100,000 to 200,000 roubles,³⁰² and the range for legal persons was between 300,000 and 500,000 roubles.³⁰³ During the reporting period, criminal sanctions were increased from three to five years' detention and, in case of aggravating circumstances or in case of certain severe consequences, to seven years.

Unlike the offence of 'disseminating false information' (see above), the suspicion here concerned the expression of an opinion, and not the presentation of 'false' facts as truth. In addition, referring to the military invasion of Ukraine as an invasion could lead to a conviction for discrediting.³⁰⁴

- Article 284.2 PC: **calling for the imposition of sanctions** against Russia, Russian citizens or Russian legal entities was criminally prosecuted with maximum penalties of fines to three years' detention. The condition for criminal prosecution was that there had already been a conviction under administrative law within the previous year for the corresponding administrative law offence (Article 20.3.4 CAO). Maximum penalties under this administrative law article are 50,000 roubles for individuals and 500,000 roubles³⁰⁵ for organisations.³⁰⁶

Examples of prosecution for criticism of the war are described in [3.7](#).

Nationality law

Since 26 October 2023, naturalised Russians could lose their Russian citizenship and be deported from Russia if they had been irrevocably convicted of certain crimes. Most of the crimes listed were related to public order and security, including extremism; activities for undesirable organisations; inflicting damage to Russia's territorial integrity; discrediting the Russian military and other government entities abroad; calling for sanctions against Russia, Russians or Russian organisations (and more); and violating rules for foreign agents. The possibility of statelessness resulting from the withdrawal is not taken into account. If the FSB security service deemed that there was a threat to national security, nationality could be revoked without the intervention of a court.³⁰⁷ According to RFERL, in six months, nearly 400 naturalised Russians lost their Russian citizenship based on this new law.³⁰⁸

High treason and state security

The maximum sentence for high treason was increased to life in April 2023.³⁰⁹ The broadened law articles mentioned in the previous COI Report were applied during

³⁰¹ Equivalent to 284 and 474 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

³⁰² Equivalent to 949 and 1,898 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

³⁰³ Equivalent to 2,847 and 4,746 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

³⁰⁴ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 139.

³⁰⁵ Equivalent to 474 and 4,746 euros, respectively, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

³⁰⁶ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 141.

³⁰⁷ SOVA, [Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2023](#), 2 May 2024; HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 147.

³⁰⁸ RFERL, [Some 400 Naturalized Russians Stripped Of Citizenship Under New Law](#), 30 April 2024.

³⁰⁹ Law № 157-FZ of 28 April 2023.

this reporting period.³¹⁰ For example, the offence of 'confidential cooperation with non-Russian persons', which was introduced in 2022, was charged forty times in 2023. This offence carries a maximum penalty of eight years' detention. In all, 101 cases for treason, espionage and confidential cooperation were filed in 2023, according to media reports. This was five times as many as in 2022. The number of criminal prosecutions for involvement in 'undesirable' organisations also increased, and new designations of organisations as 'undesirable' followed. According to HRW, this increased the risk of criminal prosecution for civil activists.³¹¹

3.2 Investigation methods: Screening of social media and facial recognition

During the reporting period, authorities screened social media and other online media for banned content. This was done both manually and with the help of AI technology. This increased the scope of monitoring: whereas a manual screening can screen around 200 pieces of footage per day, according to US research, with AI it becomes around 200,000.³¹²

The authorities were concerned with content that they believed posed a threat to public order and health. Examples include so-called 'LGBT propaganda' and content labelled as extremist, as well as 'fake news' about administrators, politicians and the state in general, negative opinions or 'manipulations' of public opinion, suicide, drug use and threats to traditional values. Authorities tested the AI systems Vepr and Oculus to investigate a part of the content and have it removed or blocked. The Vepr system was still in a testing phase and was to be implemented by the end of 2024. This was not yet the case during the reporting period. The system was designed to 'seek out and neutralise information bombs'. In February 2023, the regulator *Roskomnadzor* made³¹³ it known that the Oculus system, a surveillance tool, identifies unlawful information in images or videos that could lead to the removal of the content and the identification of individuals in those images (e.g. a photo of a person with a rainbow flag on social media). Oculus had already been launched in February 2023, and it was to be updated in 2025.³¹⁴

People could face criminal charges for such online statements as criticism of the war (see 3.7.1). It is not known to what extent the AI systems referred to above were accessible by the police or other investigative authorities or to which data were automatically shared with other authorities. No data were available on how many cases of administrative or criminal proceedings used images obtained through the aforementioned AI technology.

³¹⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 97; Article 275 PC.

³¹¹ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 137.

³¹² Atlantic Council / DFrLab, [Russia takes next step in domestic internet surveillance](#), 17 February 2023.

³¹³ The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, abbreviated as *Roskomnadzor* (RKN), is the Russian federal executive agency responsible for the regulation, control and censorship of Russia's mass media.

³¹⁴ Freedom House, [Freedom on the Net 2024 – Russia](#); Novaya Gazeta, [\[Stories - Roskomnadzor plans to use AI to monitor 'manipulations and social polarisation' online\]](#), 8 February 2023; OVD Info, [Human Rights and New Technology in Russia](#), 17 May 2023; DFrLab, [Russia takes next step in domestic internet surveillance](#), 17 February 2023.

According to the EUAA, people were prosecuted not only for their own expressions on social media, but also for reactions to expressions.³¹⁵ People could also be prosecuted years later for their expressions on social media, even if the expression had not been considered an offence at the time of posting.³¹⁶ This is because, as long as an expression had not been removed, the government considered it a continuing violation (see previous COI Report).³¹⁷ For example, in December 2023, an 18-year-old woman was charged and sentenced to 30,000 roubles³¹⁸ for discrediting the Russian military, even though her post dated from two years earlier (in other words, before the introduction of the criminalisation of 'discrediting' the military).³¹⁹ Before the reporting period, this was already happening on a limited scale after demonstrations, enabled by the deployment of facial recognition technology.³²⁰ The scale on which this type of '*post-factum*' criminal prosecution occurred during the reporting period is nevertheless unknown (see also [3.9](#) on demonstrations).

In addition to screening social media through AI, police also placed informants in chat groups.³²¹

A detailed explanation of freedom of expression on social media is presented in the previous COI Report.³²²

Facial recognition

The implementation of facial recognition technology in public transport throughout the country – already known from the Moscow metro system³²³ – was being prepared during the reporting period. This implementation was not yet widespread during the reporting period, and using facial recognition to pay in the metro was not mandatory. Critics feared that the footage from the payment system in the metro would also be used by investigating authorities, and lead to self-censorship.³²⁴

3.3 Political activists

3.3.1 Alexei Navalny and his supporters

Alexei Navalny was one of the most prominent opposition politicians in Russia and, for many years, he had been one of the figureheads of the Russian extra-parliamentary opposition. Russian authorities barred him from Russian politics. He and his organisation made a strong case for addressing large-scale corruption in Russia. Navalny died in captivity on 16 February 2024. According to media reports, the first version of the official medical documents regarding his death indicated

³¹⁵ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 9;

³¹⁶ Confidential source dated 8 October 2024.

³¹⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 77.

³¹⁸ Equivalent to 284 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

³¹⁹ Novaya Gazeta, [I want them to see that I'm not afraid](#), 31 March 2024.

³²⁰ OVD-Info, [How the Russian state uses cameras against protesters](#), 17 January 2022.

³²¹ Freedom House, [Freedom on the Net 2024 – Russia](#);

³²² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 76.

³²³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 93.

³²⁴ RFERL, ['Significant' Risks As Facial Recognition In Russia's Subways Goes Regional](#), 13 September 2024.

poisoning. This information was later removed from these documents. Russian authorities denied this; according to them, he had died a sudden natural death.³²⁵ According to his close associates, Navalny should have been released as part of a prisoner swap – which took place shortly after his death – but he was assassinated to prevent this from happening.³²⁶ In the days following Navalny's death, spontaneous commemorations arose across Russia. In the process, more than four hundred people throughout the country were arrested; some were beaten by police. As far as is known, only administrative fines were imposed.³²⁷

Navalny's body was not released by authorities until eight days after his death, after prolonged insistence by relatives, thereby complicating independent investigations into the cause of death. After his family struggled to find a funeral home and to prepare a burial site, his funeral on 1 March 2024 in Moscow culminated in the largest demonstration after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. On the first day of the demonstrations, 16,000 Russians reportedly took part in Moscow (some of whom had flown in from distant places), with several thousand on the following days. Spontaneous meetings took place in at least 19 other cities. Police attended the funeral *en masse*, but intervened little or not at all. On the day of the funeral, however, between 100³²⁸ and 150 arrests took place across Russia; in the days that followed, the police took stricter action. Memorials all over Russia were removed, and people walking around near memorials to Navalny with flowers were subsequently accosted by police, beaten or arrested.³²⁹

The criminal prosecution of Navalny's colleagues and supporters had already gained momentum during the previous reporting period, with the designation of his organisations as extremist in June 2021. The persecution continued even during this reporting period, and it did not stop after Navalny's death.³³⁰ The designation as an extremist organisation in 2021 was followed by former Navalny employees receiving criminal convictions on extremism-related charges and sentenced to years of detention, despite the fact that they had ceased their activities for Navalny's organisation after it was designated as extremist.³³¹ During the trial of Navalny himself, prosecutors went a step further, accusing him of extremist activities for an

³²⁵ Politico, *Navalny may have been killed by poisoning, documents suggest*, 30 September 2024; The Insider, *Official documents obtained by The Insider confirm Navalny was poisoned in prison*, 29 September 2024; OVD Info, [Autopsy Report on Navalny's Death](#), 17 August 2024.

³²⁶ The Guardian, *Putin had Navalny killed to thwart prisoner swap, allies claim*, 26 February 2024; Novaya Gazeta Europe, [No turning back](#), 17 February 2024.

³²⁷ Amnesty International, [Authorities brutally suppress mourners of Aleksei Navalny](#), 19 February 2024; confidential source dated 8 March 2024; The New York Times, *Russia Targets Those Grieving Navalny Death*, 19 February 2024.

³²⁸ OVD Info, [Farewell to Alexei Navalny. Lists of those detained 01.03.2024](#), updated until 23 May (RU);

³²⁹ OVD Info, [Girls, didn't you know you're not allowed to carry flowers?](#), 19 March 2024; OVD Info, [Farewell to Alexei Navalny. Lists of those detained 01.03.2024](#), updated until 23 May (RU); The Guardian, [Alexei Navalny funeral draws thousands to heavily policed Moscow church](#), 1 March 2024; confidential source dated 8 March 2024.

³³⁰ Meduza, *Hundreds of thousands of extremists*, 10 June 2021; RAAM, *After ban on Navalny's organisation as 'extremist' political life in Russia is dead*, 26 April 2021; BBC, *Aleksei Navalny: Moscow court outlaws 'extremist' organisations*, 10 June 2021; Interfax, *Court of Appeal dismisses appeals against ban on FBK, Navalny Headquarters as extremist*, 4 August 2021; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 19.

³³¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 19; The Moscow Times, *Navalny Ally Chanyшева Jailed 9.5 Years After Retrial for 'Extremism'*, 9 April 2024; Novaya Gazeta Europe, *Guilty by association - How the Russian authorities have punished Navalny supporters*, 2 March 2024.

extremist group since 2014 (in other words, even before his organisations had been classified as extremist organisations). He was sentenced to 19 years in jail for this. According to his lawyers, this conviction paved the way for extremism charges against Navalny's colleagues and supporters, based on activities they had already engaged in before being designated as an extremist organisation, and even the mere fact of membership, whether actual or alleged, of his organisation after 2014 and prior to June 2021.³³²

Supporters and associates of Navalny

The NGO Memorial maintains a record of criminal prosecutions of supporters and colleagues of Navalny. In November 2024, Memorial reported on 15 supporters and colleagues of Navalny who, up to that point, had been criminally prosecuted and sentenced to prison terms for organising an extremist group (Article 282.1 PC). In addition, 25 supporters and colleagues residing abroad were prosecuted in absentia.³³³ In June 2023, the court sentenced Lilia Chanysheva, the former head of the Navalny headquarters in Ufa, to 7.5 years in prison. She was accused of creating an 'extremist group' (Article 282.1 PC) and participation in an 'NGO that infringes citizens' rights' (Article 239 PC).³³⁴ On appeal, the sentence was increased to 9.5 years. Another local head of Navalny's organisation FBK, Vadim Ostanin, was sentenced in July 2023 to 9 years' detention for extremism.³³⁵ Both were exchanged during the aforementioned prisoner exchange. Given that Navalny himself was prosecuted for extremism for acts occurring before the date on which his organisations were designated as extremist, there are fears that associates who worked with him in the past are also at risk of prosecution.³³⁶ Information on the retrospective application of legislation is presented in the previous COI Report.³³⁷

Navalny's lawyers

With the arrest of Navalny's lawyers in 2023, people whose professions included work related to him started being targeted by the authorities. In October 2023, Navalny's lawyers – Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin and Aleksei Lipster – were arrested on charges of extremism for allegedly helping him to continue his extremist activities from prison. They were placed in pre-trial detention, declared extremists in November 2024, and tried behind closed doors.³³⁸ In January 2025, they were given 3.5 to 5.5 years' detention for participating in an 'extremist organisation'. They had allegedly passed information from prison to Navalny's associates. Evidence for this had been obtained from recordings of conversations between the lawyers and Navalny. In Russia, clients are entitled to confidential communication with their lawyers. The lawyers therefore spoke of illegally obtained evidence.³³⁹

³³² AP, [Kremlin critic Navalny convicted of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in prison](#), 4 August 2023; Aljazeera, [Russia's Navalny defends himself over 'extremism charges'](#), 19 June 2023; confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

³³³ Memorial, [The case of the 'extremist community' of Navalny supporters](#), 29 October 2021 with update from 16 August 2024, consulted on 12 November 2024;

³³⁴ Zona media, ['Continued extremist activity.' The case of Vadim Ostanin, former coordinator of Navalny's headquarters in Barnaul](#), 24 July 2023.

³³⁵ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 96.

³³⁶ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

³³⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 19.

³³⁸ Reuters, [Russian judge bars observers from 'extremism' trial of Navalny's lawyers, says Mediazona](#), 12 September 2024.

³³⁹ NOS, [Advocaten Navalny veroordeeld tot jarenlange celstraffen](#), 17 January 2025; BBC, [Russia jails lawyers who acted for late opposition leader Alexei Navalny](#), 17 January 2025.

Olga Mikhailova, another of Navalny's lawyers, decided not to return to Russia from her stay abroad in January 2024, after having been charged on the same grounds.³⁴⁰ Following Navalny's death, one of his lawyers, Vasily Dubkov, was briefly detained for disturbing public order in March 2024.³⁴¹

Journalists

In addition to his lawyers, journalists who reported on Navalny professionally were also prosecuted on charges of extremism. According to the indictment, Antonina Favorskaya and Artyom Kriger had allegedly made videos for FBK and Navalny's YouTube channel. Both FBK and SOTAvision – the journalists' employer – denied the charges. The journalists had purportedly only engaged in journalistic reporting on issues surrounding Navalny.³⁴² Konstantin Gabov was working for Moskva 24, MIR and Belsat, and Sergei Karelin was working for AP. They were arrested in April 2024, and they were also linked to videos on Navalny's YouTube channel.³⁴³

Employees abroad

In March 2024, Navalny's long-term colleague, Leonid Volkov, was attacked with a hammer in Vilnius. It has not been officially proven who was behind this attack.³⁴⁴

3.4 Other activists

For NGO staff – especially of NGOs focusing on issues relating to politics, LGBTIQ+ people and the environment – the space to operate became even narrower during the reporting period.³⁴⁵

'Foreign Agent'

One of the key pieces of legislation that suppressed civil society activities was the Foreign Agent Law (further explanation of this law is presented in [3.1](#)). In practice, designation as a foreign agent was often a precursor to more far-reaching measures. If the organisation or person concerned did not cease activities and continued them against the wishes of the authorities, further measures were taken against the organisation or person concerned.³⁴⁶

Designations as 'undesirable'

Foreign organisations operating in Russia could be designated as undesirable organisations.³⁴⁷ Various international non-profit organisations were forced to cease operations in Russia in 2023 and 2024 after having been declared undesirable.

³⁴⁰ BBC, [Alexei Navalny: Opposition leader's lawyer briefly held in Moscow](#), 27 February 2024.

³⁴¹ The Moscow Times, [Lawyer Who Helped Navalny's Mother Recover His Body Briefly Detained](#), 27 February 2024.

³⁴² The Moscow Times, [She Photographed Russian Political Prisoners. Now She's Charged With 'Extremism.'](#), 16 April 2024; The Barents Observer, [Behind bars of truth: Russian Press Day in the age of censorship](#), 14 January 2025.

³⁴³ The Moscow Times, [Trial Opens for Russian Journalists in Navalny 'Extremism' Case](#), 2 October 2024; NOS, [Rusland arresteert opnieuw twee journalisten](#), 28 April 2024.

³⁴⁴ Novaya Gazeta, [Navalny ally Leonid Volkov attacked with hammer outside home in Vilnius](#), 13 March 2024;

³⁴⁵ Novaya Gazeta, [Pavlov: Staying and going to prison is an impermissible luxury for an activist today](#), 28 October 2024; ACF, [Oligarch Leonid Nevzlin Ordered the Attack on Leonid Volkov](#), 18 September 2024.

³⁴⁶ Confidential source dated 5 November 2024.

³⁴⁷ HRW, ['Undesirable' In Russia: What Does The Label Mean And What Are The Consequences?](#), 20 February 2024; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 95.

Examples include Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Fund, the Norwegian Human Rights House Foundation and Article 19.³⁴⁸

'Extremist organisations'

Anti-extremism legislation was increasingly applied to non-profit organisations and activists during the reporting period. For example, in January 2024, an environmental activist in Bashkortostan, Fail Alsynov, was sentenced to four years' detention for inciting hatred (Article 182 PC). After his sentencing, a rare large-scale protest arose outside the courthouse. In 2022, Alsynov had delivered a speech at a demonstration against environmental damage caused by industrial gold mining.³⁴⁹ In December 2023, another environmental activist, Marat Sharafutdinov from Bashkortostan, was sentenced to nine years in prison for charges including membership of a banned organisation. Three other protesters were sentenced to three years in prison.³⁵⁰

With the designation of the 'international LGBT movement' as an extremist organisation, the authorities no longer limited themselves to designating individual activists or organisations as extremist, but they now labelled an entire group as extremist (additional explanation is presented in [2.1](#)).

International notoriety of activists did not deter authorities from prosecuting. For example, a Moscow court sentenced the human rights activist Oleg Orlov to two years and six months in prison for discrediting the military. Orlov, who was 70 years of age at that time, is one of Russia's best-known civil rights activists and the co-chair of the human rights foundation Memorial, which was banned by the Russian Supreme Court on 28 December 2021 and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022.³⁵¹

3.5 Lawyers

Lawyers working on politically sensitive cases in Russia³⁵² faced opposition and an exceptionally low acquittal rate in their work.³⁵³ Their focus had therefore long since shifted from obtaining acquittals to preventing their clients from being assaulted and

³⁴⁸ Reuters, [Greenpeace to shut down in Russia after being declared 'undesirable organisation'](#), 19 May 2023; WWF International, [WWF International statement on 'undesirable' characterisation in Russia](#), 22 June 2023; Politico, [Putin turns on the pandas!](#), 21 June 2023; website Human Rights House, [Statement on 'undesirable organisation' designation](#), 13 July 2023; Article 19, [ARTICLE 19's 'undesirable' status is only about silencing Russians](#), 15 February 2024; HRW, [Legislative minefield](#), p. 177.

³⁴⁹ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 14; RFERL, [Hundreds Gather In Ufa To Support Imprisoned Activist Amid Crackdown](#), 19 January 2024; Redaktionsnetzwerk, [Massendemo in Baimak: Russische Polizei sucht nach Teilnehmern](#), 18 January 2024.

³⁵⁰ The Moscow Times, [Bashkortostan Court Sentences Kushtau Protester to 9 Years in Prison](#), 20 November 2024.

³⁵¹ RFERL, [Russian Veteran Rights Defender Oleg Orlov Sentenced To 2 1/2 Years In Prison](#), 27 February 2024; Spiegel.de, [Russischer Bürgerrechtler Oleg Orlov zu zweieinhalb Jahren Haft verurteilt](#), 27 February 2024.

³⁵² Politically sensitive cases usually involve disputes between the government and a citizen. This section therefore refers primarily to lawyers practising in administrative law or criminal law. As a reference for the definition of 'politically sensitive matters', see also the definition of the term 'political prisoners' used by [PACE](#), which was adopted by the NGO [Memorial](#).

³⁵³ Novaya Gazeta, [Guilty-oriented justice](#), 10 June 2023.

facilitating contact between detained clients and their families (additional information on this point is provided in the previous COI Report).³⁵⁴

Whereas lawyers were still using publicity to protect their clients during the previous reporting period, during the current reporting period, they increasingly chose not to comment on cases conducted behind closed doors (such as charges of state treason). Publicity was said to draw too much negative attention to both the client and the lawyer.³⁵⁵

In October 2023, Alexei Navalny's lawyers were arrested on suspicion of passing on information and sentenced to years in prison (see [3.3.1](#)).

According to the Department One law firm, at least 174 lawyers were prosecuted in administrative, criminal and disciplinary cases in 2023. In 17% of these cases, lawyers themselves were victims of criminal facts against them (for example, physical violence). Of the prosecuted lawyers, 14% received disciplinary punishments, and criminal cases were filed against 13%. This represented a deterioration from 2022.³⁵⁶ According to them, lawyers had to conduct their work within an atmosphere of fear for their own life and health, as well as that of their loved ones.³⁵⁷

3.6 Journalists

Independent journalists who reported on politically sensitive issues (for example, the 'red lines' mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3) could not do their work without danger. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Russia, journalists working in Russia were increasingly at risk, causing many to flee abroad. The NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) spoke of arbitrary inclusion on the list of 'foreign agents', a status accompanied by heavy bureaucratic hurdles and legal risks, and the law on 'undesirable organisations', which criminalised any mention of – or cooperation with – these organisations, many of which are NGOs and media (see also [3.1](#)). Nearly 200 media organisations and more than 100 journalists had been designated as foreign agents as of September 2024, with 87 more having been added in 2023.³⁵⁸ Faced with additional risks created since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, many journalists working for independent media outlets necessarily chose exile. According to RSF, authorities continue to exert pressure on them by 'visiting' relatives or sentencing them in absentia. Those who continued to report from Russia risked criminal prosecution if their stories did not comply with 'war censorship' laws. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Russia, at least thirty journalists were detained in September 2024 on various trumped-up charges.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 35 ff.

³⁵⁵ Novaya Gazeta, [Pavlov: Staying and going to prison is an impermissible luxury for an activist today](#), 28 October 2024.

³⁵⁶ Department One, [At least 174 lawyers faced persecution in Russia in 2023](#), 31 October 2024 (RU).

³⁵⁷ The Moscow Times, [Russian Lawyers Call on Authorities to End Harassment of Legal Community](#), 16 October 2023.

³⁵⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 4.

³⁵⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 7; RSF, [Russia Fact File](#), consulted on 26 November 2024.

According to some sources, journalists with alleged connections to opposition parties, including the late Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, were detained on false charges of 'extremism and terrorism'. Examples included Olga Komleva, Antonina Favorskaya, Artyom Kriger and Sergey Karelin, who were tried together. International journalists, foreigners and people with dual citizenship were also arbitrarily detained on trumped-up charges and used for prisoner exchanges.³⁶⁰ Sentences imposed are disproportionately high – for example, 22 years in prison for the journalist Ivan Safronov – and are often imposed as a warning to others. For example, in March 2024, the journalist Roman Ivanov was sentenced to seven years in prison for posting a United Nations report on social media and a *New York Times* article about the killing of civilians in Bucha, Ukraine. Elena Trifonova, the editor of *People of Baikal in Siberia*, one of the first publications to report on the burials of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine and hidden graves, fled after a police raid on her office in September 2022.³⁶¹

On 19 September 2024, the freelance Ukrainian journalist Victoria Roshchyna died during her detention in Russia, according to a Russian Defence Ministry letter received by her family on 10 October. According to RSF, Roshchyna was the thirteenth journalist to die because of her work since the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. She was one of twenty Ukrainian journalists detained by Russia for their reporting.³⁶² Alesya Marokhovskaya, editor-in-chief of independent news medium IStories, went abroad following her registration as a 'foreign agent' in August 2021. After two administrative fines for violations of the Foreign Agent Law, a raid and search of her parents' home in Russia followed. Police ordered Marokhovskaya to return to Russia. After failing to return, she was placed on the wanted list a month later.³⁶³

3.7 Criticism of the war

The space for criticism of the state and government, and especially the war, was further curtailed during the reporting period. According to one source, administrative and criminal prosecutions had primarily taken place in the major cities in recent years. During the reporting period, however, citizens in regions outside the major cities were increasingly convicted for criticism of the government as well.³⁶⁴ An investigation for PACE describes the repression of anti-war critics as systematic.³⁶⁵

There were no amendments or new laws designed to counter criticism of the war during this reporting period, but the maximum sentences were increased.

³⁶⁰ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 7;

³⁶¹ UN Special Rapporteur on Russia, Report on the situation of Human Rights in Russia, [A/HRC/57/59](#), 13 September 2024, p. 7; RSF, [Russia Fact File](#), consulted on 26 November 2024.

³⁶² RSF, [Ukrainian journalist Victoria Roshchyna has died in a Russian jail](#), 10 October 2024.

³⁶³ The Moscow Times, [Russian Police Issue Arrest Warrant for IStories Chief Editor](#), 17 January 2025; Novaya Gazeta, [Russian police raid family home of exiled IStories editor-in-chief deemed 'foreign agent'](#), 5 December 2024.

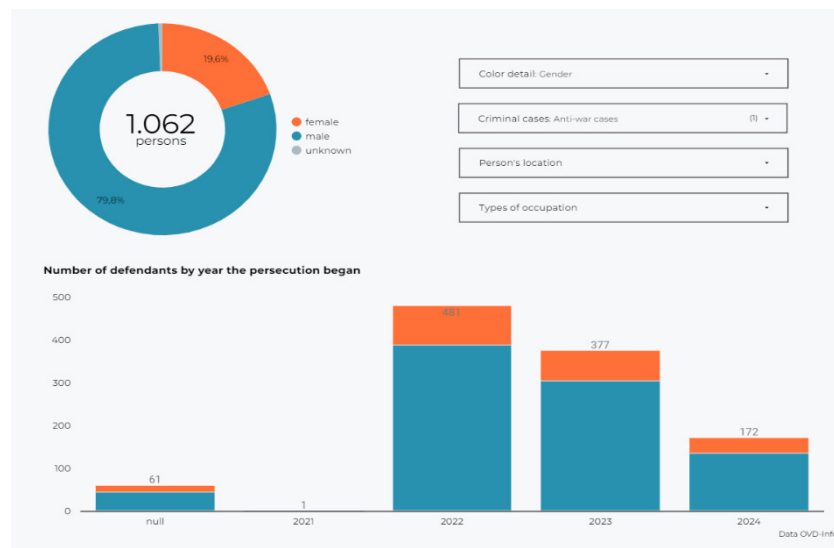
³⁶⁴ Confidential source dated 8 October 2024.

³⁶⁵ PACE, [The arbitrary detention of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the systematic persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus](#), 16 April 2024. The study speaks of both 'persecution' and 'repression'.

Information on this and other new legislation concerning criticism of the war and other topics is provided in [3.1](#).

3.7.1 *Criticism of the war – criminal cases*

The largest number of criminal prosecutions for discrediting the army or for disseminating what the authorities deem to be false information about the army was initiated in April 2022, immediately after these new sections of the law were introduced. Since then, the number of criminal cases initiated has decreased (see the chart below from OVD-Info). An up-to-date overview is available through the link in the footnote.³⁶⁶ The NGO HRW quoted a lawyer attributing the decrease in cases to the stagnation of public debate on the war due to repressive legislation.³⁶⁷ There was thus self-censorship (see the beginning of [Chapter 3](#)). Another likely cause of the decrease could be under-reporting due to the more complicated conditions of investigation in OVD-Info.³⁶⁸ For example, unlike at the beginning of the war, criminal cases against deserting soldiers were no longer heard in public.



Source: Dashboard OVD-Info, [Data on politically motivated criminal prosecutions in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024.

According to OVD-Info, around two-thirds of all politically motivated criminal cases in 2023 concerned criticism of the war – 317 of the total 483 cases.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ Dashboard OVD-Info, [Data on politically motivated criminal prosecutions in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024.

³⁶⁷ BBC, ['In the name of the Russian Federation: this did not happen'](#), 3 August 2022; HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 137.

³⁶⁸ Data from OVD are minimum data. In other words, there is a possibility of under-reporting. Before the war, OVD-Info was able to collect data through a network of regional activists and local media. Since the invasion and subsequent repression of the media and civil society, however, the organisation has switched to researching published data from enforcement agencies, court records and social media networks, supplemented by information from their own source network. The organisation notes that this has made it more difficult to collect reliable information, meaning that the data is likely to under-estimate the extent of repression.

³⁶⁹ OVD Info, [Repression in Russia in 2023. OVD-Info overview](#), 17 January 2024. OVD-Info applies the following definition: 'Political prisoners are those who are recognized as such by the Memorial organization in accordance with the Guidelines for the Definition of the Concept of "Political Prisoner" based on PACE Resolution No. 1900 (2012)'.

Types of offences

Of the approximately 1,100 suspects in criminal cases for criticism of the war (counted from the start of the war), the most commonly used suspicions were as follows: dissemination of disinformation about the army (Article 207.3 PC – 347 suspects), public incitement to terrorism (Article 205.2 PC – 226 suspects) and discrediting the army (Article 280.3 PC – 214 suspects).³⁷⁰ Arson at a recruitment office led to terrorism charges.³⁷¹

Not only criticism of the war, but also humanitarian aid to Ukrainians was punished. Years of detention were imposed for donations that benefited victims of the war in Ukraine. In the first half of 2024, years of detention were imposed for high treason in 52 criminal cases. This was a sharp increase in the number of criminal cases under this article, as compared to 2023, when there had been 39 criminal cases for treason. Some of the suspects had transferred money for humanitarian causes in Ukraine. The amount of money transferred had no effect on the punishment.³⁷²

Types of suspects

Convicted critics of the war included both prominent opposition figures and activists, as well as people without any political involvement, according to an analysis by HRW. For example, the political opponents Ilya Yashin and Vladimir Kara-Murza were sentenced to 8.5 years and 25 years' detention in April 2022 and December 2022, respectively. In October 2023, Oleg Orlov, the former chair of the NGO Memorial, was sentenced on appeal to two-and-a-half years' detention for discrediting the Russian armed forces.³⁷³ Alexei Navalny was found guilty of defaming a war veteran in a politically motivated sham trial.³⁷⁴ In November 2024, Alexei Gorinov, a Moscow city councillor, was sentenced by a military court in Vladimir to three years in prison, with an aggravated regime for 'justifying terrorism'. The sentence followed the nearly seven years he already received in 2022 for spreading 'fake news' when he called attention to children killed in the war in Ukraine.³⁷⁵ In late November 2024, the lawyer Dmitri Talantov was sentenced to seven years, and Anastasia Zibrova, a young mother, received a five-year sentence, both for 'fake news'. Shortly before, the paediatrician Nadezhda Buryanova was given 5.5 years in a penal colony, after the mother of a patient complained to the police about her critical utterances concerning the child's father, who had been killed in Ukraine.³⁷⁶

Penalties imposed

³⁷⁰ OVD-Info, [Anti-war criminal cases](#), consulted on 17 December 2024;

³⁷¹ OVD-Info, Dashboard [Criminal repression in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024; OVD-Info, [Persecution of the anti-war movement report](#), 28 February 2024.

³⁷² Treason also includes supporting a foreign organisation acting against the interests of Russia (see Article 275 PC). Rights in Russia, [Ivan Pavlov: 'Staying and going to prison is an impermissible luxury for an activist today'](#), 28 October 2024, translation of the article published in Russian in [Novaya Gazeta](#), dated 28 October 2024 (RU); IStories, [The Traitors, The Spies, The Terrorists](#), 18 October 2024.

³⁷³ HRW, [Russia's legislative minefield](#), 7 August 2024, p. 141.

³⁷⁴ Amnesty International, [Opposition politician Ilya Yashin sentenced to eight and half years in jail for denouncing Russia's war crimes in Ukraine](#), 9 December 2022; DW, [Alexei Navalny found guilty in slander case](#), 20 February 2021.

³⁷⁵ NOS, [Opnieuw kritische politicus veroordeeld in Rusland](#), 30 November 2024.

³⁷⁶ NOS, [Opnieuw kritische politicus veroordeeld in Rusland](#), 30 November 2024; The Guardian, [Moscow doctor accused by patient of criticizing war is jailed for five years](#), 12 November 2024;

Penalties imposed on critics were high, as shown in the examples presented above. If the court decided on detention, it was often for many years – only 17% of all political detainees were sentenced to less than 4 years. Of all defendants sentenced to detention, 43% received between 4 and 10 years, with 20% receiving between 10 and 15 years. Penalties of 15–20 years were imposed on 14%.³⁷⁷ In Russia, the acquittal rate is around 0.15%.³⁷⁸

Of all criminal proceedings classified by OVD-Info as politically motivated up to early 2024, around 65% involved criticism of the war. The majority of criminal cases in anti-war criticism were conducted based on evidence obtained online (for example, from Telegram, VKontakte, Instagram or other social media). Arson at a recruitment office was also a common charge.³⁷⁹

3.7.2 *Criticism of war – administrative cases*

The number of arrests (short-term detention for administrative offences or pre-trial detention pending criminal charges) on suspicion of criticising the war was around 20,070 between the start of the war in Ukraine and 14 February 2024. This was a drastic decline compared to the previous reporting period. In contrast to the 18,910 people arrested in 2022, only around 274 were arrested in 2023, and the number dropped to around 34 in the first ten months of 2024.³⁸⁰ This decline may have several explanations: There were probably fewer demonstrations during the reporting period. In addition, the police exercised more restraint at a number of large-scale demonstrations, as facial recognition allowed them to make subsequent arrests (see 3.9). In addition, there was probably also an increase in self-censorship (see the beginning of Chapter 3), and under-reporting in connection with the conditions of investigation, which have become more difficult (see 3.7.1).

Despite the decline in arrests described above, many administrative cases were filed during the reporting period. According to Mediazona, most of these cases were based on Article 20.3.3 CAO: discrediting the Russian military and state institutions. In 2023, around 2,830 administrative cases due to criticism of the war were initiated under this article. Of these cases, three quarters resulted in administrative penalties – more specifically, up to one month of administrative detention or a fine.³⁸¹ A second offence for discrediting or for spreading false information could result in criminal charges.

3.7.3 *Military bloggers*

During the previous reporting period, critical military bloggers who spoke out in favour of the war in Ukraine but criticised the conduct of the war were still relatively unaffected by the authorities, or the government even sought to cooperate with them by giving them awards or offering official positions.³⁸² The authorities expanded control and censorship over this group, during this reporting period. Prominent bloggers were arrested in the attempt to push this group into self-

³⁷⁷ OVD-Info, Dashboard [Criminal repression in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024;

³⁷⁸ Novaya Gazeta, [Guilty-oriented justice](#), 10 June 2023.

³⁷⁹ OVD-Info, Dashboard [Criminal repression in Russia](#), consulted on 17 December 2024; OVD-Info, [Persecution of the anti-war movement report](#), 28 February 2024.

³⁸⁰ OVD-Info, [Persecution of the anti-war movement report](#), 28 February 2024. BBC podcast, time stamp 20:45 [UkraineCast - Navalny's Funeral: Is protest dead in Putin's Russia? - BBC Sounds](#), 1 March 2024.

³⁸¹ OVD Info, [Repression in Russia in 2023. OVD-Info overview](#), 17 January 2024.

³⁸² ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 22 July 2024.

ensorship.³⁸³ For example, the war blogger Yegor Guzenko was arrested after being critical of 'traitors in the Kremlin' and people who were purportedly 'uncomfortable', 'like Igor Girkin'.³⁸⁴ According to the blogger, he had been offered release upon his arrest in exchange for a contract with the Ministry of Defence. After he refused, because he did not want to give up his activities as a blogger, he was charged with assault on a public servant during his arrest (Article 318 PC). He had allegedly committed that violence during his arrest. He eventually signed the military contract offered, joined a unit at the front, and his case was conditionally dismissed.³⁸⁵ Another war blogger, Alexander Sladkov, reported that he was under criminal investigation for discrediting the Russian military. These charges were dropped, and Sladkov was presented with an award for his work in September 2024. After initially being highly critical of the Russian military, Sladkov had begun to express himself positively about the new Minister of Defence, Belousov. According to the ISW, this points to cooperation with the Kremlin. There were reports of a similar collaboration with the blogger Yevgeny Poddubny.³⁸⁶ Bloggers with more than 10,000 followers have been required to register with *Roskomnadzor* since 1 November 2024. As of 1 January 2025, channels on TikTok, Telegram or other platforms can be blocked if they have not registered with *Roskomnadzor*.³⁸⁷

3.7.4 *Children and young adults*

Children were increasingly targeted by propaganda and repression during the reporting period. For certain crimes, including sabotage with a threat to public security, the minimum age for prosecution was lowered from 16 to 14 years.³⁸⁸ According to research by the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, since the invasion of Ukraine, at least 78 children have been in juvenile detention or pre-trial detention because of their anti-war statements, where they waited months to be tried.³⁸⁹ For example, a fifteen-year-old boy was arrested for an anti-war pamphlet and sentenced to five years in prison. He reported on assault by fellow inmates during his detention. His appeal was dismissed in November 2024.³⁹⁰ A ten-year-old girl was reprimanded at school for her WhatsApp profile photo featuring an anti-war meme, following a school headmaster's complaint about her. A search was then conducted at the mother's home. Neighbours were questioned as well, and they accused the mother of extremism for her anti-war stance. The woman subsequently left Russia with her daughters.³⁹¹ A 16-year-old boy was sentenced to six years in prison for an attempted terrorist attack after throwing Molotov cocktails at two

³⁸³ ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#), 5 August 2024.

³⁸⁴ The former commander Igor Girkin played a key role in the 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine, but was arrested at his home on 21 July 2023 after having expressed strong criticism of the war effort.

³⁸⁵ iStories, ['War correspondent' Yegor Guzenko, accused of attacking a police officer, has been released from custody. He will go to war with Ukraine](#), 15 November 2024; Newsweek, [Russian Pro-War Blogger Slams Putin](#), 9 September 2024.

³⁸⁶ ISW, [Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, September 8, 2024](#);

³⁸⁷ NetFreedomsProject, Telegram message [1112](#), 5 October 2024; NetFreedomsProject, Telegram message [1116](#), 1 November 2024.

³⁸⁸ Under the old Russian PC, 14-year-olds could already be charged with crimes such as murder, extortion, hostage-taking and vandalism. The amendment also includes sabotage, training for sabotage and organising or membership of a sabotage group in this list of crimes. See TASS, [Russian cabinet backs bill aiming to lower age of responsibility for sabotage to 14 years](#), 11 March 2024; Novaya Gazeta, ['I didn't do anything wrong, mum'](#), 3 July 2024.

³⁸⁹ Novaya Gazeta, [Stolen by the state](#), 28 November 2024; The Moscow Times, [The Anti-War Russian Teenagers Facing Long Prison Sentences](#), 16 July 2024.

³⁹⁰ Novaya Gazeta, ['I didn't do anything wrong, mum'](#), 3 July 2024; Novaya Gazeta, [Unapologetic](#), 26 October 2024; BBC, [Russian anti-war teenager faces five years in jail after failed appeal](#), 7 November 2024.

³⁹¹ Amnesty International, [Your children will go to an orphanage](#), 31 May 2024.

military recruitment offices. A 17-year-old girl was removed from her university and fined 30,000 roubles³⁹² for posting anti-war slogans online. The following year, she was prosecuted for repeatedly discrediting the Russian military, because she had attached poems by a Ukrainian poet and anti-war slogans to statues.³⁹³

In secondary schools, the health, safety and military training module was changed to consist exclusively of military training, in which the structure and equipment of the army was also taught.³⁹⁴ In addition, the authorities launched a propaganda campaign in schools at all levels of education. Beginning in September 2022, lessons entitled 'Important conversations' were added to the school curriculum. These lessons included discussion of the justification for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.³⁹⁵

3.7.5 *Punitive psychiatric treatment*

Research by the Andrei Sakharov Research Center for Democratic Development and the Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry indicated an increase in forced psychiatric treatment as punishment against civilians for criticising the war. Between February 2022 and November 2024, there were at least 67 examples of forced psychiatric treatment for real or alleged criminal offences. The true figures were probably higher. Victims faced serious infringement of their rights, including threats of violence, sexual humiliation, compulsory medication and deprivation of liberty. The survey revealed a drastic increase since the invasion of Ukraine, with the majority of cases related to or critical of the war. The imposition and duration of forced psychiatric treatment depended on the judgement of doctors, who, according to sources, did not dare to advise independently in political cases.³⁹⁶ The 19-year-old Maxima Lypkan was charged in Moscow for repeatedly discrediting the Russian military in critical expressions on Telegram. The court sent Lypkan to a psychiatric hospital for forced treatment after eight months in pre-trial detention.³⁹⁷

3.7.6 *Wives and mothers of soldiers*

In November 2023, wives and mothers of mobilised reservists formed a group known as 'Put Domoj' (Way Home) and protested in Moscow and other cities. Some peaceful protests were followed by arrests of journalists and police harassment of participants. The group and its head, Maria Andreeva, were declared foreign agents in May 2024.³⁹⁸ The administrative obligations of a foreign agent limited the group's

³⁹² Equivalent to 284 euros, according to xe.com; consulted on 17 January 2025.

³⁹³ The Moscow Times, [The Anti-War Russian Teenagers Facing Long Prison Sentences](#), 16 July 2024; OVD-Info website, [Daria Kozyreva](#), consulted on 19 December 2024; Novaya Gazeta, [I want them to see that I'm not afraid](#), 31 March 2024.

³⁹⁴ Novaya Gazeta, [Child soldiers](#), 28 November 2024.

³⁹⁵ Amnesty International, [Your children will go to an orphanage](#), 31 May 2024.

³⁹⁶ Website Andrei Sakharov Research Centre for Democratic Development, [Political Abuse of Psychiatry in Russia](#), consulted on 20 December 2024; Andrei Sakharov Research Centre for Democratic Development, [Political abuse of Psychiatry in Russia](#) as of November 4, 2024; The Lancet, [Warnings over misuse of psychiatry in Russia](#), 4 May 2024; The Moscow Times, [Punitive Psychiatry: An Increasingly Common Tool in Russia's Crackdown on Activists](#), 28 October 2024.

³⁹⁷ The Moscow Times, [Punitive Psychiatry: An Increasingly Common Tool in Russia's Crackdown on Activists](#), 28 October 2024.

³⁹⁸ zdf.de: Moskau: Friedensdemo endet mit Festnahmen, 3 February 24; Committee to Protect Journalists, [Moscow police detain around 20 journalists during protest by soldiers' wives](#), 7 February 2024; Moscow Times, [Branded 'Foreign Agents,' Wives and Mothers of Mobilized Russian Soldiers Face Uncertain Future](#), 18 June 2024; EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024; RFERL, [Mothers, Wives, Children Of Russian Soldiers Protest, Demand Demobilization](#), 22 September 2024; Current Time, [In Moscow, near the building of the Russian Ministry of](#)

power. Foreign agents face a high regulatory burden and risk administrative, and eventually criminal proceedings if violated, (see [3.1](#) and the previous COI Report.³⁹⁹

3.8 Monitoring of Russians outside Russia

In October 2024, the Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) reported on the possible monitoring of the Russian community in the Netherlands, citing several examples. For example, in 2022, the umbrella organisation 'Universities of the Netherlands' reported that a Russian scientist and several Russian students had received harassing phone calls. The callers said that they were from the Russian government, asking them where their loyalties lay in the war with Ukraine. The AIVD confirmed the practices following the reported incidents and made a direct link to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russians in the Netherlands have access to free media and contact with family or acquaintances in Russia. The critical view they convey is regarded as undesirable by the Russian government.⁴⁰⁰

Russia had offensive cyber programmes that the AIVD and NCTV said had been deployed in the Netherlands and were used for purposes including covertly collecting data on individuals in diaspora communities. Examples included individuals and organisations that the government had designated as dissident.⁴⁰¹

According to media reports, the Russian Interior Ministry (MVD) would like to create a database containing details concerning Russians who had left for educational programmes in 'unfriendly countries'. Human rights activists fear that this database will be used to crack down on critical Russians returning from abroad. According to media reports, the domestic passports of Russians who have fled abroad may be revoked for their criticism of the war.⁴⁰²

Social media activities of activists living abroad and critics of the Russian government can be monitored. It is not known whether a different policy applies to them than to online expressions by people residing in Russia. Additional information on this point is provided in the discussion of social-media screening using AI and facial recognition ([3.2](#)) and the trial of offences committed abroad ([3.1](#) under the heading 'Offences committed abroad and the application of Russian laws').

3.9 Demonstrations

Due to repressive government policies, there were fewer large-scale demonstrations in 2023, resulting in less large-scale arrests.

People commemorating the opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who was killed in detention (see also [3.3.1](#)), by laying flowers or holding individual protests were

[Defense, police detained participants in the action of wives and mothers of mobilized soldiers](#), 21 September 2024 (RU).

³⁹⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Country of Origin Information Report on the Russian Federation](#) March 2023, p. 93.

⁴⁰⁰ AIVD and NCTV, [Fenomeenanalyse statelijke inmenging](#), 24 October 2024, p. 23.

⁴⁰¹ AIVD and NCTV, [Fenomeenanalyse statelijke inmenging](#), 24 October 2024, p. 28.

⁴⁰² Volkskrant, [Russen die in onvriendelijke landen zaten belanden straks in databank](#), 26 July 2024.

obstructed by police and arrested. Between 16 and 19 February 2024, between 400 and 600 people were arrested, especially in major cities, including St Petersburg, Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod. The UN Special Rapporteur referred to cases of assault and torture, without the perpetrators being punished. Another 119 arrests were made on the day of Navalny's funeral.⁴⁰³

In addition, during the March 2024 presidential election, even though no large-scale arrests took place, thousands of people heeded the call by Navalny's organisation (amongst others) to vote *en masse* exactly at noon.⁴⁰⁴ Police arrested 135 people around the elections.⁴⁰⁵

After Fail Alsynov, an environmental activist in Bashkortostan, was sentenced to four years' detention in January 2024 for inciting hatred (Article 182 PC), a rare large-scale protest arose outside the courthouse. In 2022, Alsynov had delivered a speech at a demonstration against environmental damage caused by industrial gold mining. Police acted violently against the protests surrounding his sentencing, arresting more than 80 people. In July 2024, one of the protesters was sentenced to five years in jail. Two detainees died in pre-trial detention, and one detainee was hospitalised after alleged assault.⁴⁰⁶ In December 2023, another environmental activist, Marat Sharafutdinov from Bashkortostan, was sentenced to nine years in prison for charges including membership of a banned organisation. Three other protesters were sentenced to three years in prison.⁴⁰⁷

The collection of footage during demonstrations allowed police to arrest people at home at a later time, thus avoiding large-scale confrontations during the demonstration. It is not known how many so-called '*post-factum*' arrests were made during the reporting period. Even before the reporting period, OVD-Info reported that this method was part of the *modus operandi* of the police. For example, 121 '*post-factum*' arrests were made in the second half of 2020.⁴⁰⁸ In addition, there is no known period of limitation for such evidence. The Penal Code does specify a variety of limitation periods for various offences and crimes. Additional information on this point is provided in the discussion of social-media screening using AI and facial recognition (3.2).

⁴⁰³ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 14.

⁴⁰⁴ The Spectator, [The genius of the 'Noon against Putin' protest](#), 19 September 2024.

⁴⁰⁵ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 14.

⁴⁰⁶ EUAA, [Major developments in the Russian Federation regarding the human rights situation and military service](#), 21 November 2024, p. 14; RFERL, [Hundreds Gather In Ufa To Support Imprisoned Activist Amid Crackdown](#), 19 January 2024; Redaktionsnetzwerk, [Massendemo in Baimak: Russische Polizei sucht nach Teilnehmern](#), 18 January 2024.

⁴⁰⁷ The Moscow Times, [Bashkortostan Court Sentences Kushtau Protester to 9 Years in Prison](#), 20 November 2024.

⁴⁰⁸ OVD-Info, [How the Russian state uses cameras against protesters](#), 17 January 2022.

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4.2 Abbreviations

AWOL	Absent without leave
CAO	Code of Administrative Offences
COI	Country of Origin Information
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
ISW	Institute for the Study of War
RFERL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SCP	Single conscription point
PC	Penal Code