



RUSSIAN ANTIWAR
COMMITTEE



Women Imprisoned for Political Reasons: Statistics, Stories, Challenges

REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

13%

**OF INDIVIDUALS PERSECUTED ON
POLITICAL GROUNDS IN RUSSIA ARE
WOMEN.**

According to data collected by the human rights project Avtozak LIVE, as of August 2025, there are at least 10,103 individuals persecuted on political grounds in Russia. 1,288 of them are women. 508 are deprived of liberty. 221 are Ukrainian citizens. At least 38 are minor girls. At least 14 women have been subjected to torture or to practices of so-called “punitive medicine.”¹

The human rights project Avtozak LIVE collects data from open sources: media publications, press releases issued by state authorities, court records, social media posts, and other publicly available information. In practice, the number of women persecuted on political grounds in Russia may be considerably higher.

The Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia (FSIN)² does not produce detailed reports focusing on women. According to open sources, there are at least 58 penal colonies for women and 4 pre-trial detention facilities for women³. In 2004, the “strict regime”⁴ for women was abolished, so all women’s colonies are of a general regime⁵. In addition, women in Russia are not subject to life imprisonment sentences.

The system in which women persecuted on political grounds find themselves is highly opaque. One of the very few sources of information about conditions inside penitentiary institutions is prisoners’ letters. This report has been prepared, in part, based on letters from women prisoners published by the project “Through the Wall” on www.throughthewall.org

1 Compulsory treatment that is degrading, or not consistent with the medical diagnosis. Compulsory treatment that is degrading, or not consistent with the medical diagnosis.

2 Hereinafter — FSIN (Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia).

3 A pre-trial detention facility is an institution where suspects, defendants, and convicted persons who retain the right to appeal their sentence are held temporarily. Hereinafter — SIZO (pre-trial detention facility).

4 High-security penal colonies house repeat offenders and those convicted of especially grave crimes. The strict regime entails stricter discipline, a higher degree of isolation, and limitations on prisoners’ movements.

5 General-regime penal colonies house individuals convicted of crimes of medium or lesser gravity.

2. MAIN CHARGES AND GROUNDS

CRIMINAL CASES AGAINST WOMEN HAVE BEEN OPENED UNDER

125

205.2 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

public calls for terrorist activity or justification of terrorism

119

275 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

high treason

106

207.3 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

public dissemination of knowingly false information about the Russian Armed Forces

46

280.3 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

repeated discrediting of the Russian Armed Forces

Anti-war statements may be construed by the Russian authorities as “justification of terrorism.”⁶ Expressions of approval of the actions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, or even neutral commentary on politics and the war, may serve as grounds for opening a criminal case.

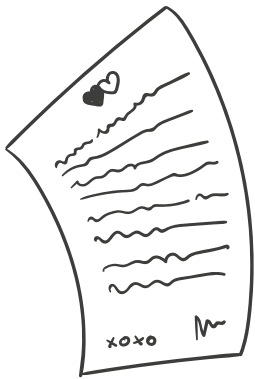
In June 2025, Natalia Doroshchenko from Irkutsk was sentenced under charges of “justification of terrorism” to five and a half years of imprisonment. The prosecution was based on publications in which she referred

to Ukrainians as defenders of their homeland and called for an end to the war.

In August 2024, human rights activist, blogger, and Doctor Alina Lushavina from Samara was arrested for reposting a text containing reflections on the causes of the terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall. She is accused of “justification of terrorism.” Lushavina herself believes she is being prosecuted in retaliation for her intention to participate in the gubernatorial elections.

“In my case, no one hides that this is purely political persecution and that there is no crime. Everyone understands this, even my investigator. [...] But despite the fact that the case is absolutely baseless, I have been held in detention for three months, and they are threatening me with a six-year sentence. They are also trying to coerce me into collaborating with the security services if I do not want to be imprisoned. [...] It is a circus, simply a circus—if it were not for my destroyed life and my child left without a mother, one could almost laugh.”

From a letter by Alina Lushavina to the project “Through the Wall,” dated 30 November 2024



⁶ Article 205.2(2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – public incitement to carry out terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism, or propaganda of terrorism committed through the Internet. Hereinafter referred to as “justification of terrorism.”

In Russia, criminal cases under the article on “high treason”⁷ may be opened for donations to any Ukrainian organization, including charitable organizations.

The case of “high treason” was opened against Elena Popova from Rostov-on-Don, triggered by a transfer of 7,000 rubles (about 70 euros) to the account of journalist Arkady Babchenko, who opposes the Russian government. In October 2024, Popova was sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 rubles. Prior to the opening of the criminal case, Elena Popova spent 35 days in a special detention facility due to so-called “carousel arrests.”⁸ She was twice re-detained for allegedly “swearing loudly” and “resisting arrest,” even without leaving the detention facility.

The articles on “dissemination of false information about the army” and “repeated discrediting of the army” were fast-tracked

and adopted by the Russian State Duma on 4 March 2022, immediately after the start of Russia’s full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine. Their actual purpose is to prohibit any statements about the war that deviate from official state propaganda⁹.

Under the article on “dissemination of false information about the army,” 68-year-old pediatrician Nadezhda Buyanova was sentenced in November 2024 to five and a half years of imprisonment. The case was opened following a complaint from the mother of a child whom the doctor had examined. She alleged that Buyanova traumatized the boy by making “negative comments” about his father, who had been killed in the war. Nadezhda Buyanova denied this and insisted that she had been falsely accused.



“A doctor, especially a pediatrician, is incapable of wishing harm to a child or his mother, or of inflicting psychological trauma on a child. Only a monster could be capable of that — and of the words that I allegedly addressed to them.”

From Nadezhda Buyanova’s final statement on 8 November 2024

⁷ Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – state treason. Hereinafter referred to as “treason.”

⁸ The practice of repeated administrative detentions on fabricated administrative charges, aimed at keeping a person in a detention facility beyond the period prescribed by law. This practice is often used to collect materials for initiating a criminal case.

⁹ Article 207.3(2)(d) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – public dissemination of knowingly false information concerning the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, motivated by political, ideological, racial, national, or religious hatred. Hereinafter referred to as “false information about the army.”

3. TERMS OF IMPRISONMENT AND AGES OF WOMEN PERSECUTED ON POLITICAL GROUNDS

The average term of imprisonment for women persecuted on political grounds is 6–8 years. However, in some cases, sentences reach up to 22 years, and the maximum sentence—27 years—was imposed on Darya Trepova, convicted of the murder of propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky.

Russian courts have sentenced at least 12 women on political grounds to terms of more than 20 years of imprisonment.¹⁰

One of the harshest sentences for non-violent acts—22 years—was imposed on activist Nadezhda Rossinskaya (Nadin Geisler).

RUSSIAN COURTS HAVE SENTENCED AT LEAST

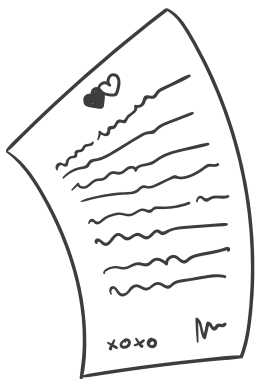
12 women

ON POLITICAL GROUNDS TO TERMS OF

more than 20 years

OF IMPRISONMENT¹⁰

“My fighting spirit is not broken, my mood remains unchanged, but my health is poor — I am constantly reliant on painkillers, and we have been struggling for months to obtain a medical examination. [...] In prison one gets exhausted, above all from enduring. Even eight hours of sleep is far from enough to rest, recover, and process everything. [...] But I will not give up, and you must stay strong as well! Sending everyone the warmest hugs!!!”



From a letter by Nadezhda Rossinskaya to the project “Through the Wall,” dated 29 October 2024

Nadezhda Rossinskaya was arrested in February 2024 and, eighteen months later, was convicted under charges of “activities directed against state security,”¹¹ “terrorist activities,”¹² and “high treason.” The prosecution was triggered by an Instagram post calling for donations to the Ukrainian “Azov” battalion¹³. Nadezhda Rossinskaya maintained that she did not control the account on which the

publication appeared. Following the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Rossinskaya founded the volunteer charitable organization “Army of Beauties.” Together with other volunteers, she delivered food and medicine to Ukrainians and assisted in evacuating people and their pets from the combat zone.

¹⁰ Two convictions were rendered in absentia.

¹¹ Article 280.4(2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – public incitement to activities directed against the security of the state.

¹² Article 205.1(4) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – facilitation of terrorist activities.

¹³ The Russian authorities designate the “Azov” battalion as a terrorist organization.

Valeria Marchenko, a poultry farm worker, was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment in a penal colony. She was arrested in March 2024 and, a year later, was convicted under charges of “high treason,” “undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities,”¹⁴ and “preparation to commit a terrorist act.”¹⁵ The trial was conducted in closed

session. According to media reports, Marchenko was accused of preparing an arson attack on a military enlistment office in Yekaterinburg. The investigation alleged that, during preparation, she had been in contact with the Ukrainian military. During the trial, Marchenko pleaded guilty. She has a 19-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter who remain free.



“I am not giving up, and I will never give up! I staked everything I had: my children, my freedom, my career, my health [...] I acted righteously, from the heart, and I regret nothing! Because it is time to stop being silent and to stop fearing to look at the countless deaths and the lawlessness of evil! [...] Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good!”

From a letter by Valeria Marchenko dated 1 September 2024

THE YOUNGEST WOMEN PERSECUTED ON POLITICAL GROUNDS IN RUSSIA ARE

14 and 15 years old

In November 2023, police officers detained 14-year-old Anna Zhuravleva at her school. The next day, she was arrested and placed in a juvenile pre-trial detention facility on charges of “participation in a terrorist organization”¹⁶ and “preparation to commit murder.”¹⁷ The grounds for the charges were her joining a private chat on school shootings and publishing a video in which she set off a firecracker in a deserted area. Following a public campaign, Anna Zhuravleva was released from pre-trial detention under a travel ban and obligation to

appear, but the criminal proceedings against her were not discontinued.

Polina Zelenko was 15 years old when she was accused of “committing a terrorist act as part of a group.” According to investigators, she was detained together with two other teenagers in Rostov-on-Don after they set fire to the cab of a grain-transport locomotive. The investigation claims that they had been promised 150,000 rubles (about 1,500 euros) by unidentified individuals in return for the arson.

AT LEAST 38 TEENAGE GIRLS HAVE BEEN PROSECUTED IN POLITICALLY MOTIVATED CRIMINAL CASES.

¹⁴ Article 205.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities.
¹⁵ Part 1 of Article 30, sub-paragraph “a” of Part 2 of Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — preparation for a terrorist act by a group of persons by prior conspiracy (hereinafter — “preparation for a terrorist act”).

¹⁶ Part 2 of Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — participation in the activities of an organization designated as terrorist under the legislation of the Russian Federation (hereinafter — “participation in a terrorist organization”).

¹⁷ Part 1 of Article 30, Sub-paragraph “a” of Part 2 of Article 105 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — preparation for the murder of two or more persons.

THE OLDEST WOMEN ACCUSED ON POLITICAL GROUNDS ARE

77 **и** **78**
y. o.

**BOTH FELL
VICTIM TO
FRAUDSTERS.**

78-year-old Nadezhda Shusharo was arrested in November 2023 on charges of “committing a terrorist act as part of a group.”¹⁸ Shusharo attempted to set fire to the military enlistment office serving the Dzerzhinsky and Kalininsky districts of Novosibirsk. She told police officers that she had sold her apartment to unknown individuals who convinced her that the property documents were inside the enlistment office. The fraudsters persuaded the pensioner that to retrieve the documents, she needed to throw a Molotov cocktail at the door of the building.

Under charges of a terrorist act¹⁹, 77-year-old St. Petersburg resident Galina Ivanova was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment. In November 2023, fraudsters posing as security service officers convinced Ivanova to throw a Molotov cocktail at a car parked near the military enlistment office. Maintaining constant contact for a month and a half, the fraudsters also persuaded her to take out loans and transfer half a million rubles (about 5,000 euros) to them.

“It is complete absurdity—the victim is being tried and punished. [...] For me, ten years in a penal colony is a death sentence. I would not survive even ten days there.”

From an interview with Galina Ivanova
before her sentencing on 17 January 2025



¹⁸ Sub-paragraph “a” of Part 2 of Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — commission of a terrorist act by a group of persons by prior conspiracy (hereinafter — “commission of a terrorist act by a group of persons”).

¹⁹ Sub-paragraph “v” of Part 2 of Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — a terrorist act resulting in significant property damage or other grave consequences.

4. KEY ISSUES DURING INVESTIGATION AND DETENTION

Conditions of detention for women are often described as comparatively more favorable than those for men. Nevertheless, women in pre-trial detention and penal colonies face systemic violations of their rights. Despite the legal guarantees of access to medical care, adequate sanitary and hygienic conditions, and compliance with standards of humane treatment, in practice numerous cases have been documented of denial of medical assistance and various forms of coercion, including psychological, physical, and sexualized violence.

4.1. LACK OF ESSENTIAL MEDICAL CARE AND MEDICINES

Women in detention face limited access to doctors, a shortage of medicines, and denial of necessary treatment. In a number of cases, this has led to a serious deterioration in health and the development of chronic conditions.

For example, 64-year-old lawyer Maria Bontsler has been diagnosed with stage III hypertension, Meniere’s disease (an incurable inner ear disorder), and chronic pyelonephritis.

Since May 2025, Bontsler has been held in a pre-trial detention center on charges of “confidential collaboration with a foreign state.”²⁰ The investigation alleges that in 2024, she provided the Ukrainian security services with information about local law enforcement officials “which became known to her in the course of her professional legal activities.” During her detention, her hearing and vision have significantly deteriorated, and osteoarthritis in both hip joints has worsened. On one occasion, after outdoor exercise, staff “forgot” Bontsler in the pouring rain; for about an hour, she repeatedly asked to be let back inside. As a result, her pyelonephritis, cystitis, and chronic bronchitis were aggravated. On 23 July 2025, Bontsler fell seriously ill during a court hearing and was taken by ambulance to a civilian hospital, where she was kept handcuffed to her bed at night. On 10 August, her treatment was interrupted, and she was returned to the pre-trial detention center.

Antonina Zimina — sentenced in 2020 to 13 years under Article 275 (high treason) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — engaged in an act of self-harm in October 2024. Since her arrest in 2018, Zimina has publicly reported on conditions of detention



“I received three sheets. On each I wrote ‘To Gorshkov from Zimina’ and ‘Explanatory Note.’ I took out a blade and slit my arm from the elbow to the wrist in one large incision. I took the three explanatory notes in my hand and handed them over, covered in blood.”

Letter from Antonina Zimina dated 27 October 2024

20 Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

and treatment in institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia (FSIN). She has been denied necessary medical care: in particular, she has not been provided with antihypertensive medication nor with required medical examinations and diagnostic tests. On the morning of 25 October 2024, Zimina experienced a hypotensive episode and requested medical assistance. Rather than providing care, prison officers reportedly demanded that she write three disciplinary/explanatory statements — alleging that she had not cleaned her cell in the morning, had been lying down, and had not performed morning exercises. A member of the medical unit reportedly stated that low blood pressure did not constitute grounds to depart from internal regulations. In protest, Zimina inflicted deep cuts to her forearms and handed over the three disciplinary statements soaked in blood.

4.2. INSUFFICIENT ACCESS TO HYGIENE PRODUCTS

Women receive only minimal supplies of hygiene products, which are insufficient to maintain basic standards of hygiene. Clean drinking water and personal hygiene products are frequent subjects of complaints and are often provided only through parcels, while there is virtually no systemic provision.

“Three months without hygiene products, a comb, underwear, shampoo. In a room with blacked-out windows,” wrote Lyudmila Kolesnikova, sentenced to 17 years for “high treason” for purchasing NFT stamps bearing symbols in support of Ukraine, in a letter to a volunteer.

4.3. TORTUROUS CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

In Russian penal colonies, punitive isolation cells (SHIZO)²¹ and stringent conditions of detention (SUS)²² have long been used as a tool of coercion and pressure against women prisoners. Women are placed there not only for serious violations but also for infractions as minor as putting soap in the wrong place, sitting on the bed during daytime hours, or brushing their teeth before 6 a.m.

58-year-old artist Lyudmila Razumova, sentenced to seven years in a penal colony under charges of “disseminating knowingly false information about the army” and “vandalism”²³ for anti-war graffiti, filed a lawsuit against the colony’s administration over her transfer to a stricter custody regime (SUS). Prior to that, she had repeatedly been placed in a punitive isolation cell (SHIZO).

During the court hearing, Razumova described the conditions under the SUS regime. The cell is located in the basement. It is constantly cold and damp, with no windows, and a pervasive stench. Instead of hot water, only a thin stream of cold water is available. The pillows and mattresses are dirty and unfit for sleeping, and the bed linen is torn. Razumova stated that the colony’s warden and staff are aware of these problems but blame the prisoners themselves.

In June 2025, the court dismissed Lyudmila Razumova’s lawsuit challenging the legality of her transfer to SUS.

21 Hereinafter — SHIZO.

22 Hereinafter — SUS.

23 Part 2 of Article 214 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — vandalism committed by a group of persons on the grounds of political, ideological, racial, national, or religious hatred.

4.4. FORCED AND UNDERPAID LABOR

Lyudmila Razumova also describes violations of labour rights and standards in women's penal colonies.



"If you dare to assert your rights, refute a fabricated report, or speak about the excessively high work quotas, they send you to SHIZO. Recently, they have begun placing prisoners in SHIZO even for alleged lack of conscientious attitude to work.' The most desirable type of slave for the administration is a woman prisoner who dutifully works double shifts without respite or days off, receiving only a pittance of 200–500 rubles. Previously, punishments were limited to reports. Now it is SHIZO."

From a letter by Lyudmila Razumova published in Novaya Gazeta on 26 May 2025

In Correctional Colony No. 5²⁴ in Vyshny Volochek, where she is serving her sentence, production quotas are deliberately set at inflated levels, impossible to meet within a standard 8-hour shift. To approach the quota, women are forced to work 12–16 hours a day, including weekends. Even then, only 20–30% of seamstresses manage to fulfill it. Those who fail receive as little as 200–500 rubles per month and are placed on "black-lists." They are punished with fabricated disciplinary reports, deprived of the possibility of early release, and subjected to heightened surveillance and control.

Seamstress work takes place in hazardous conditions: the fabric is treated with chemical substances, yet the labor is not officially classified as hazardous. Women are compelled to work even when suffering from serious

illnesses in order to avoid placement in a punishment cell (SHIZO) and to preserve the hope of a reduced sentence. This constitutes a system of forced labor, in which prisoners are compelled to toil under conditions akin to slavery for merely nominal payment, while attempts to assert their rights result in even harsher reprisals.

Information about the toxicity of fabrics and the harsh working conditions in IK-5 is also confirmed by the support group of streamer Anna Bazhutova, sentenced to 5.5 years under Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code ("public dissemination of knowingly false information about the Russian Armed Forces") for reading accounts of Bucha residents during a livestream. Bazhutova, like most prisoners, devel-

oped allergic reactions to fabric dyes and severe leg swelling caused by overwork.

Olga Bendas, sentenced to 2 years under the provision criminalizing “use of violence against a police officer,”²⁵ served her sentence in Correctional Colony No. 3 (IK-3) in Kineshma. In 2021, during a rally in support of Alexei Navalny, she pushed away a police officer who was beating an elderly participant with a baton, for which criminal proceedings were initiated against her.

Bendas described the colony as a state within a state. Prisoners were made responsible for the functioning of the colony: they cleaned the grounds, carried out repair and construction work, baked bread, cooked prison gruel, cleaned the sewers, worked in the bathhouse and boiler room, as well as in the library, the food kiosk, and so on.

Shortly before Bendas’s arrival at IK-3 in Kineshma, three women prisoners suffered gas poisoning while cleaning sewer wells where they had been sent to work. Two of them died, and another suffered severe poisoning. It was only due to Olga Bendas that this became known to the public, and criminal proceedings were brought against the colony’s management.

4.5. PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL, AND SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

Women prisoners are subjected to abuse, intimidation, and pressure both from penitentiary staff and from other prisoners.

Journalist Maria Ponomarenko, sentenced in 2023 to 6 years under the provision crim-

inalizing dissemination of so-called “fakes about the army” for a post concerning Russia’s strike on the drama theater in Mariupol, and in 2025 to 1 year and 10 months under the provision criminalizing “use of violence against a penitentiary officer,”²⁶ was subjected to involuntary psychiatric treatment with unidentified drugs, confiscation by FSIN officers of foodstuffs even formally authorized for possession, and threats.

Ponomarenko repeatedly undertook hunger strikes and made suicide attempts due to the pressure and unbearable conditions of detention. Between late July and August 9, 2025, she made three suicide attempts and suffered severe blood loss. On August 12, the journalist was transferred to the regional tuberculosis hospital in Barnaul for psychiatric evaluation and treatment.

Anna Zhuravleva, the youngest woman known to be persecuted on political grounds, was subjected to physical, psychological, and sexualized violence by her cellmates while held in a pre-trial detention facility: they pelted her with tomatoes, pushed her under a bunk, and slammed her head against the wall. She was forced into degrading sexual acts and raped with foreign objects. Her cellmates incited her to take her own life, which resulted in a suicide attempt. Anna was afraid to report the abuse to the staff, fearing for her life. Meanwhile, the administration of the detention facility possessed a video showing Anna Zhuravleva naked, with a sign bearing a humiliating inscription around her neck, standing on a table in her cell and crying.

²⁵ Part 1 of Article 318 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — the use of violence not endangering life or health, or the threat of such violence, against a public official or their relatives in connection with the performance of official duties.

²⁶ Part 2 of Article 321 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — the use of violence against a staff member of a place of deprivation of liberty in connection with the performance of official duties.

5. DEATHS OF WOMEN DURING CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS AND IN DETENTION

At least nine women persecuted on political grounds have died in Russia while in custody or during criminal proceedings.

61-year-old pensioner Elena Markova died in her cell at SIZO-6 in Moscow, officially recorded as “heart failure.” She had been arrested in May 2023 on charges of “public incitement to commit terrorist acts” and “participation in a terrorist organization.” The case was based on an allegedly planned act — releasing foil-covered balloons during the 9 May parade. Markova is survived by her son with autism, who has been declared partially incapacitated. He is being cared for by neighbors.

26-year-old journalist Viktoria Roshchyna was taken prisoner in August 2023. On 19

September 2024, she died while being transported from Taganrog to Moscow. Her body was returned to Ukraine only at the end of February 2025 as part of an exchange of deceased persons with Russia. Upon transfer of her body to Ukraine, it was established that Roshchyna was emaciated and weighed less than 30 kg. According to testimony from a cellmate, she had been beaten, tortured with electric shocks, subjected to knife wounds, and then concealed from inspections. Before the body was returned, certain organs had been removed: her eyes, brain, and part of her larynx. The hyoid bone was found broken.

6. MOTHERS IN DETENTION

Women persecuted on political grounds in Russia find themselves cut off not only from the outside world but also from their children, who suffer hardships no less severe than those of their mothers. Children are suddenly separated from their mothers, left in orphanages or placed in the care of relatives. Maintaining contact becomes almost impossible. The following accounts describe mothers and their struggle to preserve their families under conditions of repression.

There are 48 women persecuted on political grounds who have children

On 5 August 2025, the Sevastopol City Court in Russian-annexed Crimea sentenced Aleksandra Strilets and her mother, Viktoria

Strilets, to 12 years’ imprisonment each under the provision criminalizing “high treason.” The case materials have been classified as a state secret, and the sole court hearing was held in camera. According to the version published by the prosecutor’s office, Aleksandra allegedly transmitted via a messenger application to a channel controlled by Ukrainian intelligence photographs of Russian Armed Forces facilities taken by her mother.

Aleksandra Strilets ran a Telegram channel where she wrote about herself, her work, and her daughters. Her eldest daughter, Solomiia, will turn five in November. Her youngest, now six months old, was born prematurely in March 2025, weighing 530 grams, and remains in an intensive care unit. It remains

unknown who will take care of Aleksandra's daughters.

Another prisoner, Valentina Tagirova, has not seen her daughter Ulyana nor spoken with her by phone for two and a half years.

Two days before the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Tagirova and her daughter were transported from Donetsk under the pretext of receiving so-called "Putin payments" for refugees. They believed they were going to the Rostov region for a couple of days. Instead, they were taken to a "temporary placement facility" in Samara. Tagirova decided to remain there due to the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In the winter of 2023, an individual identifying himself as "Platon" contacted Tagirova via a messaging application. He issued threats against her and compelled her to purchase acetone, a plastic canister, a sheet of styrofoam, and a can of aluminum paint, and to deliver these items to a pre-arranged loca-

tion. There, she was detained on suspicion of "preparation of a terrorist act."

According to Valentina Tagirova and human rights defenders, "Platon" was in fact an alias used by Yegor Yelistratov, an officer of the Federal Security Service of Russia.

On June 3, 2025, the Central District Military Court sentenced Valentina Tagirova to 8 years' imprisonment under the provision criminalizing "preparation of a terrorist act."

Since her detention, Valentina Tagirova has not been permitted any phone calls to her daughter. Following her arrest, Ulyana was placed in a state orphanage. A month later, Tagirova's father was able to take her back to Donetsk, a partially occupied territory subject to regular shelling. Ulyana is now with her grandmother in Poland, while Valentina Tagirova remains unable to contact her, because calls from colonies to so-called "unfriendly countries" are prohibited.

"Please let me return to my daughter as soon as possible. She loves me very much and misses me. And I miss her. What I did, fortunately, caused no harm to people. I have already been behind bars for two years. This is a lesson I will never forget; it will be with me for my entire life."

From the closing statement of Valentina Tagirova on 2 June 2025



Polina Yevtushenko, 24, is the mother of 7-year-old Alisa. In July 2023, Polina was detained as she was leaving the kindergarten where she had taken her daughter. She is currently on trial for a conversation about the war with a provocateur and for posts on Instagram: a link to a petition calling for the impeachment of Vladimir Putin; photographs of banknotes with anti-war inscriptions; and guidelines for military personnel on surrendering to captivity. Her Instagram account had only 127 followers, and her anti-war posts received between two and eight likes.

Polina's daughter now lives with her grandmother, who has to care both for her young

granddaughter and for her daughter. Alisa and Polina's mother come for "visits" at the pre-trial detention center. A "visit" consists of an hour-long conversation over the phone, separated by glass.

Polina Yevtushenko is facing a sentence of up to 22.5 years in a penal colony. She was arrested in July 2023 and is to be prosecuted under six provisions of the Criminal Code: preparation to commit high treason, facilitating terrorist activities²⁷, incitement to extremist activities²⁸, justification of terrorism, dissemination of so-called "fakes about the army," and rehabilitation of Nazism²⁹.



"At the last visit, I brought a sketchbook with me in which I drew pictures for Alisa. She really liked it. Before that, I once showed Alisa our old photos from before my imprisonment, but she started crying, and I decided I would not do that again. <...> Conversations through glass can hardly be called visits, but we are grateful for what little we have. What I truly miss, however, are hugs. I want to hug and kiss Alisa, but I am not allowed to."

From a letter to Polina Yevtushenko's support group dated 26 July 2025

²⁷ Part 1 of Article 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — public denial of the facts established by the judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the trial and punishment of the major war criminals of the European Axis countries, approval of the crimes established by that judgment, as well as dissemination of knowingly false information about the activities of the USSR during the Second World War and about veterans of the Great Patriotic War.

²⁸ Part 2 of Article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — public calls for extremist activity using the Internet.

²⁹ Part 4 of Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation — dissemination via the Internet of information expressing explicit disrespect towards society about Russia's days of military glory and commemorative dates.

7. CONCLUSION

Repression against women in contemporary Russia is used by the authorities to intimidate and suppress dissent.

The unpredictability of political persecution is a key tool of intimidation: criminal proceedings are initiated on various grounds, without discernible logic or uniform standards. Women of different ages, from minors to pensioners, and from various professional backgrounds face prosecution: not only journalists and activists, but also artists, doctors, and hairdressers. Grounds for initiating criminal proceedings include social media posts, participation in peaceful protests, donations to charitable organizations, public statements, or even private conversations. Charges are brought under a wide range of provisions of the Criminal Code, from “high treason” and “advocacy or justification of terrorism” to “dissemination of so-called ‘fakes’ about the army” and “repeated ‘discrediting’ of the armed forces.” Mothers of young children also receive lengthy prison sentences.

It is impossible to predict in advance which specific actions or words will be deemed criminal, and who will be the next to find herself in the defendant’s seat.

This creates an atmosphere of insecurity, fear, and self-censorship in Russia.

Women who find themselves in detention facilities face a multitude of systemic problems:

lack of medical care; shortage of hygiene products; degrading conditions of detention; forced and poorly paid labor; psychological, physical, and sexualized violence. These violations are documented both during the investigation phase and throughout the period of serving their sentences.

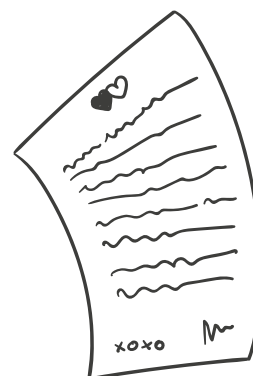
Of particular concern is the situation of elderly women and women suffering from severe medical conditions, who may not live to see the end of their sentence.

The international community must maintain sustained attention to the problems of women persecuted on political grounds in Russia and call for transparency in judicial processes and respect for fundamental human rights. Otherwise, the humanitarian catastrophe in Russian prisons will continue to claim the lives of women and destroy families.

Women political prisoners themselves ask not to be forgotten. In March 2021, the Sevastopol City Court in the Russian-occupied Crimean Peninsula sentenced Galina Dovgopolaya to 12 years’ imprisonment on charges of “high treason.” In the spring of 2025, Dovgopolaya turned 70. Over the years of her imprisonment, her health has significantly deteriorated: it is difficult for her to move, and she has a tooth knocked out.

“I ask one thing from everyone—no fundraising for me! The only help is broad public attention and reminding the government of Ukraine not to keep the issue of political prisoners swept under the carpet. We are waiting here, and each of us is fighting for our lives so as not to ‘die in Russia’ behind barbed wire. We ask everyone not to forget about us! Glory to Ukraine!”

Из письма Галины Довгополой изданию Грани от 29.09.2021



Coordinated international action can change the situation. The prisoner exchange that took place in 2024 demonstrated that international attention and diplomatic efforts can yield tangible results—saving lives and restoring freedom to women. As a result of this exchange, Russian opposition figures Lilia Chanyшева and Ksenia Fadeeva, journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, and artist Aleksandra Skochilenko were released. For Skochilenko, this was not only a return to freedom but also likely saved her life. She suffers from celiac disease and heart conditions that require constant monitoring and a strict diet, yet in detention she did not receive adequate treatment. Her health had severely deteriorated. In 2025, another exchange took place,

in which Russia transferred to the United States authorities Ksenia Karelina, who had been sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment for "high treason" for making a €51 donation to a Ukrainian charitable organization.

Despite the inhumane conditions of detention, many women continue to speak out about injustice and suffering in the world. Those of us who are free must make every effort to ensure that the voices of women in Russia are heard. Each of their letters may serve as the last testimony that, even in the face of death, they remain true to their convictions and values.



"The world is shaken by yet another dangerous conflict between nuclear powers. People are losing their minds over petty causes, killing each other for worthless things. Let them try to bring back even one child killed by a bullet or a shell. They will not succeed."

From a letter by Maria Ponomarenko to the project "Through the Wall," dated 12 May 2025

The governments of democratic countries must intensify their efforts to negotiate further prisoner exchanges, provide assistance to women persecuted on political grounds, and raise awareness of the repression against women in Russia.

The Anti-War Committee of Russia stands ready to offer consultations and participate in initiatives aimed at securing the release of political prisoners.

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