

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PROSECUTIONS OF MINORS IN RUSSIA

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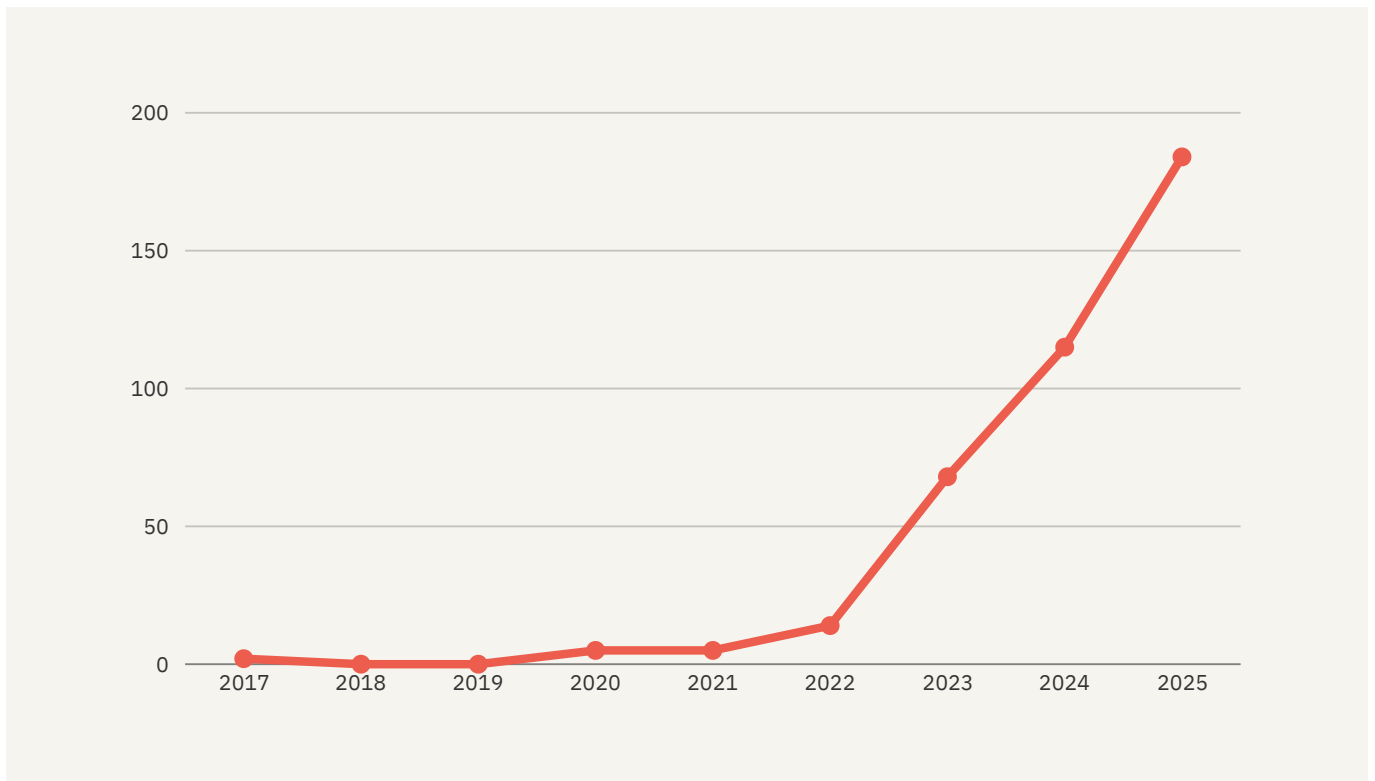


NUMBER OF PROSECUTIONS

Our database currently contains the names of more than **9,630 individuals** who have been victims, most likely, of politically motivated prosecutions. Some of these individuals are in prison, others have been prosecuted without being deprived of their liberty, and yet others have already served their sentences. We know very little about some of these cases; often we do not even know the names of individuals involved in a criminal case, their age, or the details of the charges. This lack of information is primarily because the judicial system, and more broadly the repressive system in Russia, is becoming increasingly secretive. The public is not allowed access to the courts, many hearings are held in camera, information about those arrested or remanded in custody is not passed on to the media, and those being prosecuted, as well as their relatives and lawyers, receive threats from the investigative authorities and fear publicity.

Consequently, we cannot calculate with absolute certainty how many people have been subjected to politically motivated prosecution **before they turned 18**, nor how many minors are currently deprived of their liberty in Russia. However, in this report we share the data we have gathered.

Figure 1. Politically motivated prosecutions of minors by year



Source: Political Prisoners Memorial



We know of at least **124 minors** prosecuted for political reasons, of whom **107 were deprived of their liberty**. In total, **427 minors** had criminal proceedings initiated against them. Of these, **299 were deprived of their liberty** – taken into custody, placed under house arrest or sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

If we look at the number of politically motivated cases against minors by year, we see a dramatic surge in such prosecutions after 2022.

- Whilst in 2020 proceedings were initiated against **five minors**,
- and the same number were under investigation in 2021,
- by 2022 this figure had risen to **14**,
- in 2023 to **68**,
- and in 2024 to **115**.
- In 2025, criminal cases were brought against **184 minors**,
- and in the first four months of 2026 there were already **34 such cases**.

It should be noted once again that information about criminal cases is frequently subject to delay; we often learn of prosecutions months after they began. Information about the grounds for arrests and detentions, as well as the names and ages of those involved, is scattered and cannot be verified immediately. There is therefore every reason to believe that in due course we shall learn of more cases that were initiated in the autumn of 2025 and the winter of 2025-2026, and that the curve on our graph will rise even more steeply.



MINORS WHO ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS

For the reasons described above, we are far from always able to examine a criminal case where there are indications of a political motivation and reach a conclusion. It is particularly difficult to obtain sufficient information about politically motivated prosecutions of minors. However, in some cases, we do manage to analyse the charges and conclude that a minor prisoner fits our definition of a [political prisoner](#). Below, we describe nine such cases.

The case of Nikita Uvarov (2020)



The prosecution of Nikita Uvarov and his friends began in June 2020, when the 14-year-old teenagers were detained for putting up leaflets in support of political prisoners. After their phones were seized and their messages examined, the secondary school students were charged with undergoing training in terrorist activities, and later with organising a terrorist group, although the latter charge was eventually dropped because of the group's lack of the necessary structure. The case received widespread publicity because of the initial plans of the investigative authorities to use as evidence the teenagers' intention to 'blow up' an FSB building they had constructed in the Minecraft video game.

However, this allegation was removed from the final indictment. In February 2022, the court sentenced Nikita Uvarov to **five years** in a general regime penal colony. Two other children, Bogdan Andreev and Denis Mikhailenko, who had pleaded guilty under pressure and cooperated with the investigative authorities, were given suspended sentences.

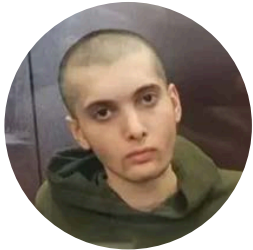
The crux of the charge was that the teenagers, holding anarchist views, had independently studied instructions on how to make explosives and conducted experiments with firecrackers in deserted areas. The investigative authorities and the court deemed these actions to be 'training with the aim of carrying out a terrorist attack' on the local FSB headquarters. In addition to training in terrorism, all three were charged with the unlawful manufacture and possession of explosives. The defendants themselves did not deny conducting experiments with pyrotechnics but insisted they had done so out of curiosity and that they had not planned to carry out terrorist attacks but merely wanted to appear grown-up in online correspondence.

The grounds for recognising Nikita Uvarov as a **political prisoner** were the clear political motivation behind the case and numerous violations during the investigation. The prosecution's case was built on dubious linguistic analyses, in which discussions of Kropotkin's books and fictional weapons (Gauss gun) were interpreted as preparations for a terrorist attack, and on witness statements which, according to the defence, were given under duress.

Serious violations of the rights of minors were recorded, including physical violence at the time of their arrest (Uvarov was grabbed by the throat), interrogations at night lasting many hours, and falsification of a teacher's presence in the records.



The case of Ismail Isaev (2020)



The persecution of the brothers Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isaev, who were 19 and 17 years old respectively at the time of their first arrest, began long before their criminal prosecution officially began and was closely linked to their opposition activities online and their sexual orientation.

Back in April 2020, the Chechen authorities circulated a video showing the young men ‘repenting’ for criticising the authorities and Islam in the Telegram chat ‘Osai Nakh 95.’ According to the brothers and their mother, this was preceded by their abduction and two months’ unlawful detention in the cellars of a police regiment in Grozny, where they were beaten, humiliated and subjected to attempts to ‘correct’ their non-traditional sexual orientation. After their release in May 2020, the family, with the support of human rights activists, managed to take the brothers to Nizhny Novgorod. However, on 4 February 2021, they were detained again, forcibly taken to Chechnya and remanded in custody. In February 2022, Salekh was sentenced to **eight years** in a penal colony and Ismail to **six years**.

The official charge was ‘aiding an illegal armed group.’ The investigative authorities claimed that in June 2020, the brothers contacted the militant Rustam Borchashvili via Facebook and twice delivered food to him in the forest. The evidence consisted almost exclusively of the brothers’ own confessions, which they later retracted, claiming they had been tortured, and on the testimony of two witnesses, both drivers, whose accounts of the events matched almost word for word. However, the investigative authorities failed to identify either the social media accounts or the telephone numbers used for the alleged correspondence, and Borchashvili’s very identity appears to be mythical: he has been repeatedly reported as having been killed since 2013.

We consider the falsification of evidence in the case and the political motives behind the prosecution to be grounds to recognise Magamadov and Isaev as **political prisoners**. The case was fraught with numerous violations: abductions, torture, denial of access to lawyers, and physical pressure on the detainees’ father, who was beaten at a police station and forced to renounce his defence counsel.

The detention of the minor Isaev was extended even after it had been officially overturned by the Supreme Court of the Chechen Republic. The lawyers learned that the security forces had pressured the young men’s distant relatives to commit an ‘honour killing’ (the term given to the murder of a family member whose behaviour goes beyond what is approved in traditional society in the Caucasus). The lawyers demanded that the teenagers be provided with protection. Magamadov and Isaev were then transferred to a special unit at the remand prison where, instead of being granted protection, they were barred from visits by their close relatives.

We believe the true motive for the prosecution was retaliation for the brothers’ public criticism of the regime and the fact that they belonged to the **LGBT community**.



The cases of Lyubov Lizunova and Aleksandr Snezhkov (2022)



The criminal prosecutions of the young Chita antifascists Lyubov Lizunova and Aleksandr Snezhkov began in October 2022. The cases were initiated because of graffiti ('Death to the regime') painted on the wall of an abandoned garage. The initial charge of vandalism was quickly followed by more serious charges of incitement to extremism and justification of terrorism for posts on Telegram channels about anarchism, protests against military action, acts of sabotage and attacks on supporters of the war. Despite the young age of the participants – Lizunova was a 16-year-old secondary school student at the time of her arrest, and Snezhkov had only recently turned 18 – the investigative authorities and the courts took a hard line. In January 2023, following an alleged attempt to abscond, Snezhkov was remanded in custody while Lizunova, initially placed under house arrest, was soon also remanded in custody on the pretext of breaches of her pre-trial conditions.



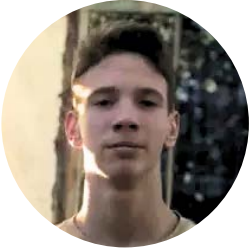
In the spring of 2024, Lizunova was convicted and sentenced to **three and a half years** in a penal colony on charges of justification of terrorism and incitement to extremism; Snezhkov was sentenced to **six years**. While in custody, Snezhkov had been given an additional sentence for discussing his case with fellow inmates, reading them the post for which he had been convicted. In November 2025, the court designated the 'Transbaikal Leftist Union' – a group allegedly formed by the young people – as a terrorist organisation.

There is a clear disproportion between the offence and the punishment imposed. Writing graffiti on an abandoned building, which, in normal circumstances, is classified as petty hooliganism or another administrative offence, was, in this case, criminalised for political reasons. The teenagers were prosecuted not for causing actual damage to property, but for publicly expressing opposition views and criticising the government.

Aleksandr Snezhkov was charged twice for the same text, a text which contained no justification of terrorism. Lyubov Lizunova was charged with a longer list of publications, some of which contained elements of incitement to violence and justification of violent acts. However, the court, in sentencing, ignored the young age of the convicted person. The use of 'anti-terrorism' legislation in a case involving statements by a minor, even if they are radical, is excessive. The case reveals selective application of the law: imprisonment for online posts and graffiti is applied to opponents of the authorities far more frequently and harshly than to supporters of the official line for similar or even more aggressive statements. Designating a group of young people as a terrorist organisation for running a Telegram channel appears unjustified. The court was not presented with sufficient evidence of either the actual existence of the alleged organisation or of the alleged terrorist nature of the teenagers' activities.



The case of Valery Zaitsev (2023)



The criminal case against Valery Zaitsev and Nikita Turlaev from Khabarovsk Krai is yet another example of the prosecution of minors under anti-terrorism laws.

In October 2023, 14-year-old secondary school student Valery Zaitsev – an orphan suffering from tuberculosis – was detained. Despite his illness, he was remanded in custody. Later, 18-year-old college student Nikita Turlaev was detained in connection with the same case.

In August 2024, a military court sentenced Valery Zaitsev to **four and a half years**’ imprisonment in a juvenile penal colony, and in November of the same year Turlaev was sentenced to **11 years**’ imprisonment, on charges of ‘participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation.’

The basis for the charge was that the young men were allegedly members of Azov, a Ukrainian military unit designated as a terrorist organisation in Russia. According to the investigative authorities, Valery Zaitsev underwent training in terrorist activities, learning how to make incendiary mixtures and testing them in deserted areas. Nikita Turlaev was accused of administering groups on Telegram and VK, as well as of publicly inciting terrorism online. The evidence consisted of video recordings of tests of homemade pyrotechnic devices on the wall of an abandoned building and analysis of private correspondence.

Zaitsev and Turlaev have been recognised as **political prisoners** on the grounds that their alleged links to the Azov unit – a military unit whose designation as a ‘terrorist organisation’ is unjustifiable – were fabricated. Viewing videos online and independently manufacturing a flammable mixture were unlawfully deemed to constitute training in terrorism.

Furthermore, we believe the teenagers were victims of a police sting operation. According to available information, the classified ‘witness’ who testified in the case himself brought the teenagers bottles of petrol and showed them how to make Molotov cocktails. Yet the teenagers’ actions posed no real danger to the public. There were no grounds to equate their interest in politics and pyrotechnics with terrorism.

In the case of Zaitsev, a lengthy prison sentence has been imposed on a minor in need of special health care, putting the teenager’s life **at risk**.



The case of Yegor Balazeikin (2023)



Criminal proceedings against Yegor Balazeikin, a secondary school student from Leningrad Oblast, began in February 2023. At the time, Balazeikin was 16 years old. He was arrested following a failed attempt to set fire to a military enlistment office in the town of Kirovsk (bottles containing a flammable mixture he threw against a wall failed to ignite; no damage was caused to the building). Later, an episode involving a similar attempt in St Petersburg was added to the case — Balazeikin himself reported the incident, but the investigative authorities were unable to establish its date as nobody had noticed it. In November 2023, when Balazeikin had turned 17, a military court sentenced him to **six years**’ imprisonment in a juvenile penal colony.

Balazeikin was charged with two counts of attempting to commit a terrorist act. The investigative authorities insisted the school student’s actions were aimed at destabilising the authorities and intimidating the population. Balazeikin himself did not deny that he had thrown the bottles and openly stated his anti-war convictions. He said he had been driven to take such action by deep personal grief at the death of a loved one at the front and a desire to protest against what was happening. Despite the absence of material damage or injuries, the initial charge of damage to property was reclassified as a terrorist act. The main evidence in the case was the record of the teenager’s first interrogation, which took place in the absence of his parents. Furthermore, the court-appointed lawyer did not conduct a confidential interview with her client and allowed the investigator to ask leading questions.

We have recognised Balazeikin as a **political prisoner** on account of the unjustifiable classification of his actions as terrorism and the manifestly disproportionate nature of the punishment. The teenager’s motives were not terrorist in nature, and his actions — throwing bottles of diesel fuel at a concrete wall, which could not in any way have ignited — posed no threat either to human life or caused mass panic among the public.

A critical aspect of the case is the teenager’s state of health: diagnosed with progressive autoimmune hepatitis, in prison conditions, Yegor’s liver fibrosis is progressing, posing a **direct threat** to his life.



The case of Arseny Turbin (2023)



The criminal prosecution of Arseny Turbin, a secondary school student from Oryol Oblast, began in late August 2023 when FSB officers searched his family's apartment. At the time, Turbin was 15 years old. The acts of which he was accused were committed when he was 14. Under house arrest from September 2023, in June 2024 a military court sentenced Turbin to **five years**' imprisonment in a juvenile penal colony. He was taken into custody in the courtroom.

The charge against him was 'participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation – the Free Russia Legion.' The investigative authorities claimed that, on the instructions of 'handlers' via a Telegram bot, Turbin joined the organisation and distributed leaflets criticising the Russian leadership. Turbin himself did not deny he had placed the leaflets in post boxes but insisted he had done so on his own initiative and out of personal conviction, not on anyone's orders.

The leaflets Turbin distributed criticised Vladimir Putin but did not contain any calls for terrorism. The investigative authorities artificially criminalised what were in fact entirely legal actions, alleging without grounds that he was acting as a member of a terrorist organisation. Moreover, there is no evidence that Turbin joined the Free Russia Legion. In correspondence with an unknown person online, Turbin merely expressed a willingness to distribute leaflets, not to fight or plan terrorist attacks. Furthermore, the designation of the Free Russia Legion, a unit of the Ukrainian armed forces, as a terrorist organisation is unjustified. The very suggestion that a 14-year-old boy from Russia was recruited into a unit of the Ukrainian armed forces through correspondence in a chatbot is absurd.

The prosecution of this teenager for his civic stance has been intended to **intimidate** young people and is an example of the use of anti-terrorism legislation to suppress criticism of the authorities.

Arseny Turbin has maintained his innocence of the charges, which led to constant pressure being exerted on him in prison and, most likely, a second criminal case, as discussed below.



The cases of Artemy Doronin and Yegor Lauskis (2023)



Criminal proceedings against St Petersburg secondary school students Artemy Doronin and Yegor Lauskis were initiated in September 2023.

At the time of his arrest, Doronin was 14 years old; Yegor had turned 14 just a few months before his arrest. In May 2024, a military court found them both guilty of committing a terrorist act and sentenced them to terms of imprisonment in a juvenile penal colony.

Doronin was sentenced to **four years** and Lauskis to **two years**.



The basis for the charges was the arson of a signal box on a railway line in St Petersburg. According to the investigative authorities, the teenagers acted in collusion, having received instructions via Telegram from an unknown individual. The investigators classified the teenagers' actions as terrorism, claiming their aim in committing the arson was to destabilise the authorities and influence their decision-making regarding the conduct of the special military operation. The teenagers and their legal representatives pointed out that they had been motivated solely by a desire to 'test' the incendiary mixture and to prove themselves.

There were no grounds to classify the actions of Doronin and Lauskis as terrorism. The damage to a single relay cabinet did not and could not have led to serious consequences such as train derailments or loss of life. The investigative authorities failed to prove the teenagers had intended to cause 'fear among the public.' The teenagers themselves stated the very concept of 'destabilising the authorities' was unfamiliar to them. Without these essential elements, their actions cannot be considered as terrorism. The teenagers were provoked to carry out the arson by an unknown adult on the internet who used the nickname 'Magavk'. According to Doronin, 'Magavk' had manipulated and threatened him online. The boys threw one bottle at a relay cabinet and ran off immediately. The damage amounted to 758 roubles and the relay cabinet required nothing more than a touch of paint. Given the young age of the offenders, they could not be charged with sabotage or wilful damage to property. The charge of terrorism was the only way to ensure they were sentenced to terms of imprisonment, which was likely the reason for the absurd classification.

The sentence imposed was **disproportionate** to the public danger posed by the teenagers' actions.



The case of Yeva Bagrova (2024)



The criminal prosecution of Yeva Bagrova, a secondary school student from St Petersburg, began in December 2024. At the time of her arrest, she was 16 years old. Initially, Bagrova was remanded in custody, but then transferred to house arrest. However, following sentencing in October 2025, she was taken into custody again. The court sentenced her to four years' imprisonment in a juvenile penal colony.

Yeva was accused of posting photographs of the founders of the Russian Volunteer Corps (a unit of the Ukrainian army designated as terrorist in Russia) with the caption 'Honoured Heroes of Russia' on a noticeboard at her school. The investigative authorities classified this action as 'public justification of terrorism.' In addition, she was charged with 'aiding terrorist activities.' Bagrova herself initially admitted her guilt, but her legal representatives later claimed the confessions had been obtained under severe psychological pressure and threats from law enforcement officers, without the presence of legal representatives or lawyers.

Yeva claimed she was **threatened with torture**, as well as with violence against her father and brother.

Yeva's elder brother, Danila Bagrov, had been arrested several months before her and was later convicted of treason for an alleged attempt to join the Russian Volunteer Corps.

The prosecution's main witness – a secondary school student named Nikitin, whom Bagrova allegedly persuaded to join the Russian Volunteer Corps (an incident which formed the basis for the charge of aiding terrorism) – stated in court that he testified against Bagrova under pressure and withdrew his testimony.

Yeva Bagrova's criminal prosecution and imprisonment violated her right to freedom of expression, and her actions have been artificially criminalised.

Displaying photographs on a school noticeboard, even with controversial captions, does not pose the public danger requisite for a prosecution under anti-terrorism laws.

Yeva Bagrova was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment on the basis of an inappropriate classification of her actions. Her conviction, as a minor, was based on evidence obtained in gross violation of her right to a defence.



The above cases are merely the tip of the iceberg. Most often, we learn of the prosecution of children from FSB press releases containing a summary of their version of events. In **243 cases**, we do not even know the names of the minors prosecuted on criminal charges. However, based on the data we have, we can draw conclusions about how such cases are handled.

In almost all prosecutions, there are **violations of the law** during the arrest and interrogation of minors. Violence, intimidation and pressure are frequently used against them. In many cases, the interrogation of minors takes place without legal representatives being present, and their rights to a defence are violated. Either lawyers are not present at all during interrogations, or defence lawyers appointed by the investigative authorities treat their obligations towards their underage clients as a mere formality.

In all prosecutions we examined, the assessment of the minors' actions was inappropriate, and the classification of their actions (under anti-terrorism laws) was incorrect. In several cases, entirely legal actions by teenagers were deemed criminal. In others, experiments with incendiary mixtures, attempted arson and strong statements on the internet were classified as terrorism. Investigators and prosecutors often see such a classification as the only way to deprive a minor of their liberty, as criminal liability from the age of 14 applies only in a strictly limited number of offences. Imprisonment is not imposed as a punishment on minors who commit minor or intermediate-level offences for the first time before the age of 16, or a minor offence before the age of 18.

Investigators classify the actions of minors who committed arson in exchange for a promised monetary reward either as sabotage or, more often, as terrorism. Following the start of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there has been a wave of such arson attacks, which has grown with each passing year. Children and teenagers are recruited through gaming communities or channels offering 'easy money'. Minors are often deceived, initially being asked to carry out harmless tasks – such as taking photographs or passing on location coordinates – before being intimidated with threats of negative consequences of their actions. Sometimes teenagers or young people carry out arson attacks, believing they are taking part in some kind of business dispute or as part of an insurance fraud.

Of the **299 children** and teenagers deprived of their liberty most likely for political reasons,

- **196** were charged under anti-terrorism laws,
- while a further **85** were charged with sabotage.



SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM REGARDING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Russian legislation

Generally, criminal responsibility begins at the age of 16. Criminal liability from the age of 14 is possible only in a small number of serious or especially serious crimes, including murder, theft, robbery and terrorism. In April 2026, sabotage, aiding and abetting sabotage, and training in sabotage were added to the list of such crimes.

The Criminal Procedure Code of the Russian Federation establishes the right of minors to additional procedural safeguards, which must be ensured at all stages of criminal proceedings in their regard. The law sets strict limits on the questioning of minors. Such questioning may not continue without a break for more than two hours, and in total may not exceed four hours in a day. For the questioning of persons under the age of 16, as well as those aged 16–18 if they suffer from a mental disorder or have a developmental issue, the presence of a teacher or psychologist is mandatory. Parents or guardians of a child or adolescent have the right to be present during the presentation of charges and questioning, as well as to review the records.

A minor may be remanded in custody only in exceptional cases and for the minimum necessary period. The [Resolution of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation of 1 February 2011 'On judicial practice in the application of legislation regulating the specific features of criminal liability and punishment of minors'](#) states:



Justice in respect of juvenile offenders must be directed towards ensuring that the measures applied to them provide the most individualised approach to the investigation of the circumstances of the offence committed and are commensurate both with the characteristics of the individual and the circumstances of the offence committed, contribute to the prevention of unlawful extremist acts and crimes among juveniles, ensure their resocialisation, and protect the legitimate interests of victims.



As can be seen from the cases considered above, the additional procedural safeguards provided for by law, as well as the specific approaches to justice mandated for minors, are grossly violated in practice. In addition to cases of violations of the rights of children and adolescents during interrogations and prolonged deprivation of liberty, both during the investigation and following a court sentence, we note a clear bias towards conviction, the artificial criminalisation of minors' actions, and the application of disproportionate penalties in relation to the public danger posed by their actions.

Moreover, not only the actual practice but also the legal framework for the administration of justice in respect of minors in the Russian Federation often fails to comply with the recommendations of international bodies.

Since all the prosecutions described above are related to terrorism, here we examine international approaches to justice for children and adolescents suspected of committing crimes of an extremist and terrorist nature.



International theory and practice

The most comprehensive and relevant documents in this field are the [‘Roadmap of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime \[UNODC\] on the Treatment of Children Associated with Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups’](#) and the Recommendation CM/Rec (2021)7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States [‘On Measures to Protect Children from Radicalisation for the Purposes of Terrorism’](#) (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 October 2021 at the 1415th meeting of deputy ministers).

Both documents set out a similar approach, aimed primarily at protecting the rights of minors. The documents propose focusing not on punishment, but on the long-term reintegration of the child into society through individual support plans, psychological support and work with communities to prevent stigmatisation.

The Council of Europe’s Recommendation emphasises that cases involving minors must be dealt with exclusively within the framework of a specialised juvenile justice system, and not in military or counter-terrorism courts. At the same time,



the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a minor must be a measure of last resort and applied for the shortest possible period

– **UNODC Roadmap**, paragraph 14, sub-paragraph 6

A similar requirement is contained in [Directive \(EU\) 2016/800](#), adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 11 May 2016. [‘Roadmap on Child Protection Systems in the EU – 2023 Update,’](#) prepared by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, examines alternatives to deprivation of liberty that should be applied to minors, including measures such as guardianship, guidance, supervision, counselling, probation, and educational and vocational training programmes.

How EU Member States deal with minors accused of justifying terrorism and extremism can be considered with reference to the case of the 2020 murder in France of schoolteacher Samuel Paty. The tragedy occurred after a 13-year-old girl falsely accused the teacher of having shown cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in class and of having removed her from the classroom for objecting to this.

The secondary school student had been suspended from lessons for truancy and had lied to her father to cover it up. Following this, the girl’s father and other adults, including a well-known Islamic preacher, launched a hate campaign online, calling for violence against the teacher. The killer – an 18-year-old from Chechnya – was shot dead during his arrest. Both adult defendants and the teenagers involved to varying degrees in the crime, in the dissemination of calls for people to engage in terrorism and in the issuing of statements condoning terrorism, appeared before the courts.



First and foremost, it must be emphasised that the cases of the adults and teenagers were heard by different courts, and the approach in assessing their actions, considering the recommendations described above, varied. The adult defendants who participated in the hate campaign launched against Paty were found guilty and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. For instance, the schoolgirl's father received a **10-year** prison sentence, while the preacher who called for violence was sentenced to **16 years**.

Even before these harsh sentences, in 2023 decisions had been made regarding the minors involved in the case. Here, it is worth distinguishing between the trials of those children and teenagers who had direct contact with the attacker and those minors who spread calls for violence and information about the attack online. Schoolchildren aged between 13 and 15, who had pointed Samuel Paty out to the killer and followed him, received sentences of between **12 and 24 months**, mostly suspended. The most severe sentence was **six months'** house arrest, followed by an **18-month** suspended sentence.

The girl student who slandered the teacher was given an **18-month** suspended sentence. The teenagers who disseminated terrorist calls online and condoned violence against the teacher (including the circulation of a photograph of Paty's body taken by the killer) were not sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Preventive and educational measures were applied in their cases, such as administrative supervision and monitoring, civics courses and similar measures.

At present, French courts are considering applications from the convicted individuals to have their probation lifted, given their admission to higher education institutions and the lack of information available to the supervisory authorities about the need to extend it. As of May 2026, there are no known cases of reoffending among the teenagers involved in the 'Paty case.' We see that the French justice system acted in this case in accordance with the regulations and recommendations listed above regarding the focus on the rehabilitation of minors and their reintegration into society without stigmatisation.

In this way, we can see that, in democratic countries, where the accused is a juvenile, this has a **direct impact** on the possibility of prosecution and on the types of measures to be applied, both in theory and in practice.

The prosecutions of minors in the Russian Federation examined above show that the recommendations of the UNODC and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, requiring the focus of measures taken in respect of children and adolescents to be on crime prevention and integration into society rather than punishment, were not applied. All trials took place in military courts and were marked by a bias in favour of conviction. Children and adolescents were often deprived of their liberty even before being found guilty, and in court they were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. In several cases, torture, pressure and intimidation were used during the interrogation of minors.



SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MINORS

The justice system in dealing with minors, children and adolescents, must take their specific characteristics into account and be primarily focused on crime prevention and the protection of the child's interests, rather than on punishment. The most important principles for the prevention of juvenile delinquency are set out in the '[Riyadh Guidelines](#)', adopted by [Resolution 45/112](#) of the UN General Assembly on 14 December 1990. The document states that, in the interests of society, crime prevention and the protection of children,



the need for and importance of progressive delinquency prevention policies and the systematic study and the elaboration of measures should be recognized. These should avoid criminalizing and penalizing a child for behaviour that does not cause serious damage to the development of the child or harm to others.

The same document rightly notes that



youthful behaviour or conduct that does not conform to overall social norms and values is often part of the maturation and growth process and tends to disappear spontaneously in most individuals with the transition to adulthood.

Psychologists note certain behavioural characteristics of adolescents that often lead them to commit rash, dangerous acts, and sometimes even crimes. Adolescents tend to underestimate the likelihood of a negative outcome and overestimate the importance to their lives of immediate rewards, such as approval from peers or adults, increased status, or a successful outcome in a risky situation. In psychology, there is a term known as the 'peer effect.' In the presence of friends, the risk that an adolescent may commit an offence increases significantly, as social recognition is more important to a teenager's mind than the legal consequences.

Furthermore, adolescents are often unable to assess the public danger of their actions, that is, the extent of harm they may cause to the public or to another person's life. Experts agree on adolescents' propensity for risky behaviour (see, for example, [WHO Bulletin. 'Adolescent Mental Health'](#)). There are physiological explanations for this: in adolescents, the frontal lobes of the cerebral cortex — the part responsible for planning and impulse control — are still developing, while emotions themselves can already be very strong. This creates a 'gap' between a strong impulse and the ability to suppress it. The process of physiological maturation of the human brain is only fully complete by the age of 21–25. (see, for example, '[Adolescent brain development: characteristics and risk factors](#)')



When evaluating criminal prosecutions of minors after 2022, it is also necessary to consider the context provided by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the unprecedented militaristic propaganda that has swept the country. The general rise in aggression, the deep divisions within society and reports of casualties during military operations all place an additional strain on the mental health of children and adolescents. Their actions in a situation of crisis, deep internal protest and the search for justice may be risky and ill-considered.

Adolescent psychologist Yury Lapshin (a former head of the psychological service at School No. 57 in Moscow and Le Sallay Academy) told our Project that a key feature of adolescence is the need to demonstrate agency — to take independent action that expresses their attitude towards what is happening in the world around them and allows them to feel themselves independent actors:



This need outstrips their current ability to plan and assess the consequences of their actions, or to weigh the risks. At the same time, in most cases neither family nor school, as the main institutions for socialisation of children and adolescents, provide sufficient opportunities either to discuss children's views or for them to take independent, creative action. Such an opportunity is provided by the digital space, in which modern teenagers are growing up and in which they feel completely competent. It is there that they freely exchange information on topics of interest to them, express and discuss their views, look for part-time work, and announce and publish 'reports' on their activities.

We believe that this sense of competence in the digital space increases the risk of minors becoming victims of provocations, including by law enforcement agencies.

At the same time, the state effectively encourages law enforcement agencies and the courts to adopt a prosecutorial bias — not to protect, but to accuse and severely punish, and in certain cases likely provoke children into committing rash acts. Such actions against minors fit into the general policy of searching for 'enemies within.' It is precisely in relation to children and adolescents that such actions demonstrate a special absurdity and cruelty.

Russian law enforcement agencies and courts have effectively abandoned compliance with the provisions of international conventions and principles, as well as the Resolution of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on the application of legislation in respect of minors. Paragraph 2 of the [Resolution](#) explicitly states that when considering criminal cases that involve minors, courts must consider, along with other international instruments, the provisions of the aforementioned 'UN Riyadh Guidelines.' These establish that, instead of a punitive approach which has proven ineffective, any national programme to combat juvenile delinquency must focus on ensuring the well-being, rights and interests of young people.



PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PROSECUTION OF MINORS

At present, there are no sociological studies assessing public attitudes on the issue of juvenile delinquency.

However, in our work on the issue of politically motivated convictions of minors, we observe a keen public interest. Our reports on politically motivated prosecutions of children and adolescents receive numerous responses. The reactions suggest that public opinion is largely divided between two opposing points of view.

Overall, the views of the Russian public regarding the general tightening of penalties for criminal offences are relatively harsh. According to a [FOM poll](#) from March 2023,

- **44%** of respondents were in favour of tougher judicial practices;
- **17%** were convinced nothing should be changed,
- and only **11%** of those surveyed advocated mitigation of criminal penalties.
- Russians support tougher penalties for murder— **22%** of those surveyed,
- rape — **16%**,
- paedophilia — **11%**
- and crimes against children and minors — **8%**.
- Some respondents support reducing penalties for offences such as petty theft — **9%**
- and hooliganism — **3%**.

Only **2%** of respondents suggest taking a more lenient approach to unlawful acts committed by minors.



The comments left by users under our social media posts about criminal cases involving teenagers suggest a significant proportion of our fellow citizens are not prepared to treat minors in line with the approaches set out in the UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency.

While some comments do indeed support treating teenagers leniently and ending the criminal prosecution of children, others express vehement opposition.

Here are some of the most typical comments of this kind:



Let them serve their time and they'll come to their senses! When they're up to all sorts of nonsense, they think they're grown-ups, brave! But as soon as you give them a taste of their own medicine, they turn into little children! If you've committed a crime, then answer for it like an adult!

Kids like that should be in a loony bin so people can live in peace.

Why on earth did he set it on fire in the first place??? What nonsense, it's obvious where it will get you; now there's news about such cases everywhere.

It's really scary; what if he threw it into a crowd of children or caused a situation where a train derailed?

It's his own fault; he's ill and still goes and interferes. He thought after doing this, he'd end up in a pioneer camp. That's what prison is for, for serving your sentence. And what he did would be severely punished in any country. So, there's no need to make excuses for him. Some things are allowed, and some aren't.

Even if we assume that some of these comments were posted by bots — and this is often the case — such statements receive supportive reactions. Many social media users tend to agree with such views.

We see that adult Russians generally believe teenagers should be treated as adults, just as responsible as themselves, if to a lesser extent. For many, teenagers evoke not sympathy and understanding, but fear of possible aggression. People tend to express the view that if children are brought up properly (as they themselves supposedly were), then a teenager will not commit a rash act, will not 'meddle in politics' and will not be subjected to prosecution.



Psychologist Yury Lapshin comments on the attitude of some adults towards the prosecution of minors:



In a situation of acute conflict and division within society, there is a growing demand for a simplified view of the world. This is also reflected in attitudes towards offences (real and imagined) committed by teenagers. To their loved ones, they are first and foremost children; to outsiders who have read about ‘crimes’ in the news, ‘you committed a crime, answer for it like an adult.’ The idea that a teenager’s offence is, first and foremost, a sign of a failure on the part of society, which does not provide sufficient support for the child’s development and personal growth, currently finds no support. The efforts of public institutions are directed primarily at identifying and punishing offenders with the aim of intimidating other potential offenders.

Such an approach stigmatises those who have genuinely committed a crime and reinforces their antisocial behaviour. However, for teenagers facing fabricated, politically motivated charges, this situation proves particularly dramatic and traumatic.



REPEATED PROSECUTIONS OF TEENAGE POLITICAL PRISONERS

The phenomenon of the Russian security forces targeting children and teenagers, and the search for ‘enemies’ among minors, continues with a whole series of **fresh criminal cases** brought against young people who have been imprisoned as teenagers.

Among those whose cases are described above, at least four already face renewed criminal prosecution.

Nikita Uvarov, the first 14-year-old to be imprisoned on terrorism charges, was not released after he served the full five-year prison sentence imposed by the military court. He was to be released on 19 March 2026. However, a week before, on 12 March, he was charged with a new offence of ‘participation in the activities of the extremist organisation AUE.’ The prison subculture known as AUE, which can be interpreted as ‘prisoners’ way of life’ [arrestantskii uklad zhizni], though there are other interpretations, has never been a real group. Nevertheless, in 2020, ‘AUE’ was designated by the Supreme Court as an extremist organisation. According to the prosecution, Uvarov allegedly *‘taught convicts the code of conduct and the laws of the criminal world.’* Instead of returning home, where he had not been for five years, Uvarov found himself back in a remand prison, where he was denied visits and phone calls from his mother and other relatives. Even visits from his lawyer are, according to a report by [Novaya gazeta](#), being hindered.

Seventeen-year-olds Artemy Doronin and Arseny Turbin have been removed from the Perm juvenile penal colony and placed in a remand prison on new charges of participating in a ‘riot’ at the detention centre. Arseny Turbin’s family had several times reported that the authorities at the detention centre put pressure on Turbin to admit his guilt and even take part in a propaganda video expressing ‘repentance.’ The teenager was repeatedly placed in solitary confinement. There was also an attempt to plant a notebook on him containing notes about the principles of the ‘AUE’.

In the [opinion](#) of Turbin’s relatives and defence team, the riot in the juvenile penal colony was staged to prevent him from being released and to persuade him to admit his guilt.

We have no information as to whether the riot was staged or was the result of incompetence on the part of the authorities at the juvenile penal colony. In either case, responsibility first and foremost lies with the organisers of the riot and the adults authorised to ensure the protection and well-being of minors, even within the walls of a juvenile penal colony. In our view, the prosecution of the juvenile political prisoners Doronin and Turbin on charges of ‘riot’ – a riot which they did not organise and in which, by all accounts, they did not participate – fits into the general pattern of treatment of adolescents, involving pressure, coercion to admit guilt, and harsh punishment.



Aleksandr Snezhkov was given a second criminal sentence for one and the same short text. While still in a remand prison, he was provoked into discussing the reasons for his punishment by a prisoner with recording equipment planted in his cell by FSB operatives. Snezhkov read to his cellmates the online post that had led to his first criminal conviction and as a result received an additional prison sentence for ‘justifying terrorism.’ In November 2025, the court designated the Telegram channel 75ZLO, run by Aleksandr Snezhkov and Lyubov Lizunova, as a terrorist organisation. The court asserted that the young people had set up this organisation when Lyubov was 13 and Aleksandr was 16. It can only be feared that Lizunova and Snezhkov, who were ruled to be administrators of the channel, as well as the channel’s young subscribers, may face further prosecution by the security services on terrorism charges.

We agree with the expert findings on which, among other things, the UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency are based. Excessive criminalisation and stigmatisation of adolescents’ actions lead not to rehabilitation, but to the entrenchment of undesirable behaviour. At the same time, programmes aimed at combating crime must include



efforts on the part of the entire society to ensure the harmonious development of adolescents, with respect for and promotion of their personality from early childhood.

If these efforts are not successful, adolescents prosecuted for criminal offences may become firmly entrenched in the criminal world. At the same time, minors who have fallen victim to politically motivated repression, and have been unjustly imprisoned, suffer further from unjust harsh punishment and attempts by the state’s repressive forces to break their will. This struggle waged by the state’s repressive apparatus against children and adolescents is cause for dismay and profound concern, not only for the fate of individual minors but also for the state of society as a whole and its prospects for the future.

We call on the authorities of the Russian Federation to abandon the practice of politically motivated, unlawful prosecution of children and adolescents and the intimidation of young people, as well as the practices of sting operations, pressure and prosecutorial bias in the investigation and adjudication of cases involving minors in the courts. We call for compliance with the provisions set out in the Resolution of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation regulating the criminal liability and punishment of minors, as well as for the provisions of other relevant standards and norms to be taken into account, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules, 1985), the Milan Plan of Action and the Guiding Principles for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in the context of Development and the New International Economic Order (1985), the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines, 1990).

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If you know of any cases of illegal politically motivated prosecution, please contact us through our [CHATBOT](#) or at HELP.POLITICAL.PRISONERS@SUPPORTPZK.ORG

