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## **Input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders to the Human Rights Council on child and youth human rights defenders**

[Русская версия](#)

### **INTRODUCTION**

The input is prepared by OVD-Info human rights project in response to the call for inputs on child and youth human rights defenders from the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders.

OVD-Info is an independent human rights defence and media project. OVD-info focuses on the rights to freedom of assembly and expression, but its work extends further. OVD-Info works on the ground in Russia and globally aiming at putting an end to political persecution in Russia. For this purpose, it collects data and produces content about political repressions in Russia, coordinates legal aid to those unjustly

persecuted, and works towards systemic change in the human rights field.

The input aims to unveil the situation regarding the rights of child and youth human rights defenders in Russia. National legislation and policies provide no specific protection for them. On the contrary, child and youth human rights defenders face devastating pressure exercised by the government. The authorities use a vast range of instruments to suppress dissent and prevent them from human rights activities. As a result, such an approach inevitably leads to a chilling effect on human rights protection in Russia.

## **I. IS THERE SPECIFIC PROTECTION ACCORDED TO CHILD AND YOUTH HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN YOUR COUNTRY, EITHER AS PART OF A LAW ON THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS OR THROUGH POLICIES AND ACTION PLANS? DO CHILD AND YOUTH HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS HAVE ACCESS TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS?**

1. There is no specific protection for child and youth human rights defenders in Russia. The authorities have not developed specific legal provisions or policies to protect and promote their human rights activities. They can only appeal to the court, the prosecutor's office, the ombudsman, and similar bodies on general grounds. According to Russian legislation, a child may appeal to the court on their own from the age of 14. Access to international mechanisms has become restricted for Russian human rights defenders with Russia's withdrawal from the Council of Europe

as it is no longer possible to apply to the European Court of Human Rights.

## **II. ARE CHILD AND YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FACING ANY PARTICULAR RISKS OR CHALLENGES?**

2. Child and youth human rights defenders in Russia face a multitude of risks. First of all, they risk becoming the subjects of a politically motivated criminal case or the objects of extrajudicial persecution. The Russian authorities use various repressive instruments provided for by legislation and non-legislative ones. Similar to adult human rights defenders, they can, for example, be recognised as foreign agents, charged with extremist activities, or persecuted for anti-war protests and so forth. However, due to their age and vulnerability, these pressures affect them more severely. This will be illustrated below with some examples.

3. Valeria Vetoshkina is a lawyer from St. Petersburg. In 2019, she graduated from university at the age of 22 and began her human rights work. After graduation she started working as a lawyer in the Team 29 human rights project. In March 2021, at the age of 23, Valeria obtained attorney status and started practicing criminal cases. She was involved in accessing the archives of repressed people and uncovering the activities of state bodies. Valeria handled cases of the Anti-Corruption Foundation regarding its recognition as an extremist organization. She also defended Alexei Vorobyov and scientist Valery Golubkin on charges of treason. In the summer of 2020, she began cooperating with OVD-Info, helping, *inter alia*, those detained at protests in support of Alexei Navalny. On 8 November 2021, when Valeria was 24 years old, she was added to the list of foreign agents. The Ministry of Justice stated that Valeria had commented on media outlets recognized as foreign agents and had received foreign funding. Valeria Vetoshkina was fined

30,000 rubles under the article on failure to submit a «foreign agency» report (part 2 of article 19.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences). Due to this pressure from the authorities, Valeria had to leave Russia.

4. Timofey Vaskin, who is 22 years old, is a human rights lawyer from Novorossiysk. In 2019, he moved to Moscow, where he immediately entered the university to study law. His first experience in human rights was assisting a lawyer at protests in the winter of 2021, caused by the detention of Alexei Navalny, who had returned to Russia on 17 January 2021. He was 21 years old when he was subjected to criminal prosecution due to his alleged involvement in the youth democratic movement «Vesna», which was established in 2013 in Saint Petersburg.

5. «Vesna» conducts a variety of activities including campaigning for human rights in Russia, organisation of peaceful protests, election monitoring, and fighting against corruption and unfair welfare reforms. In May 2022, a criminal case was initiated against the «participants» of the «Vesna» movement under the provision on the establishment of NPOs infringing on the personality and rights of citizens (Article 239 of the Criminal Code). According to the investigation, the participants induced citizens to participate in unauthorised protests, thereby involving them in illegal activities. Eight people have been accused, including Timofey Vaskin, Ivan Drobotov, Angelina Roshchupko, and Roman Maksimov. In October 2022, the movement was labeled as a foreign agent. In December 2022, it was recognised as an extremist organisation. In June 2023, a new case against «Vesna» activists was reported. Six people, including Yan Ksenzhepolsky, were accused. Yan Ksenzhepolsky is currently in custody, and some other defendants, including Timofey Vaskin, Ivan Drobotov, Angelina Roshchupko, and Roman Maksimov, had to leave Russia.

6. This is not the first time that Russian authorities have prosecuted young people for «calls» to participate in peaceful protests. For example, criminal cases have been brought against journalists and political activists of the student magazine DOXA, Armen Aramyan, Alla Gutnikova, Vladimir Metelkin, and Natalia Tyshkevich, under Article 151.2 of the Russian Criminal Code for «involving a minor in committing acts endangering the life of a minor.» Criminal cases against the editors of the student magazine DOXA were initiated for a video clip urging students not to be afraid of threats of expulsion from the university for participating in rallies. The editors of the magazine were sentenced to two years of correctional labour.

7. Russian authorities also use non-legal instruments of persecution to target human rights defenders, including children and youth, and their families. For example, in 2020, Vladimir Vasilenko, a 20-year-old lawyer from Moscow, started to defend the rights of victims of politically motivated cases. In February 2021, officers from the Investigative Committee for Stavropol Krai visited Vladimir's mother and questioned her.

8. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir has regularly defended anti-war activists in courts and police departments. According to Vladimir's statement, after the invasion, Vladimir noted being followed and stopped by police officers on the subway. In May 2023, when crossing the Russian state border at Mineralnye Vody airport, he was interrogated by officers of the Federal Security Service. The authorities asked Vladimir's opinion about the war with Ukraine. The officers also said that Vladimir's work in the human rights field undermines the foundations of Russia's constitutional order. The interrogation lasted about 3 hours. During all this time Vladimir was not given water or the opportunity to take medication.

### **III. IS HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION PROVIDED IN SCHOOLS, AND IS HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM ENCOURAGED AND SUPPORTED IN EDUCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC SETTINGS?**

9. The education system in Russia is not sufficiently oriented towards disseminating humanistic values and knowledge about human rights and freedoms.

10. For example, the Federal State Educational Standards do not provide for the concepts of «human rights and freedoms», «rights of the child», «mechanisms for the protection of human rights and freedoms», etc. The term «human rights» is only explicitly mentioned in the Federal State Educational Standard for bachelor's degrees in Jurisprudence. The Federal State Educational Standard for Secondary Education only mentions «constitutional rights and duties», which, in our opinion, carries a different implication as it is listed among terms such as «traditional values» and «readiness to serve and protect the Motherland». The Federal working program for the academic subject «Social Studies» does not allow for any criticism of the current regime or its human rights abuses, and students are thus taught a one-sided position.

11. Additionally, following the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities made several amendments to the school curriculum. Firstly, every Monday Russian schools conduct so-called «Razgovory o vazhnom [Talks about what is important]», where the students are educated on «patriotic» topics. For instance, the topic of such a seminar on 12 September 2023 was the war in Ukraine, and students were told about Ukrainian «nationalists» and other justifications for the ongoing aggression. Attendance at these seminars is compulsory and pupils and their parents are

prosecuted by the police for non-attendance. The following case is an example of many cases. In October 2022, the Commission for Juvenile Affairs ruled that Yelena Zholiker, the mother of 10-year-old Varvara Galkina, was not properly fulfilling her parental duties. The reasons for this were Varvara's non-attendance of «Razgovory o vazhnom» seminars, the use of a pro-Ukrainian photo in her social network account profile, and a post about Russian military aggression in Ukraine. After an interrogation of Elena and Varvara at the police station and a search of their home, the family was released with a warning. However, the family is now registered as being in a socially dangerous situation.

12. Secondly, Russian authorities developed new history textbooks for 10th and 11th grades. The latter has a completely rewritten section on the period from 1970 to the 2000s, and a section on the period from 2014 to the present day was added. A separate section is devoted to the «special operation» in Ukraine. It quotes Vladimir Putin, who claimed that Russia launched the «special operation» to stop the armed conflict in Ukraine. These measures combined constitute war propaganda and contradict the principles and values of human rights and democracy.

13. Education in the field of human rights is being promoted mostly by non-governmental human rights organisations. This, however, has been largely impeded by the legislation on foreign agents that prohibits conducting educational activities for minors by «foreign agents» enacted on 1 December 2022.

#### **IV. ARE THERE ANY POLICIES IN PLACE TO LIMIT THE DISCRETION OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO EXPEL OR OTHERWISE SANCTION STUDENTS FOR ENGAGING IN LEGITIMATE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM?**

14. From a legal standpoint, educational institutions may not impose rules and sanctions relating to the students' pastime, specifically in public places, such as their participation in rallies and pickets. There are known cases where universities were forced to make changes to expulsion laws because of this rule. This happened, for example, in the Cheboksary Electromechanical College and the Vladimir State University. However, when it comes to political activism and defence of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, Russian colleges and universities continue to pressure students with dissent views. Among other things, university administrations:



- use minor formal misconduct as a justification for expelling students while the real cause is activism or human rights work (as in the case of Victor Novogorskiy);
- actively sabotage student activists' educational process (for example, the administration of Moscow State University threatened Marina Kim and Fariza Dudarova, two students engaged in human rights activism, with expulsion and pressured a teacher into failing them during an exam);
- create superficial obstacles and use them as a reason for expulsion and censure of creative work of student human rights defenders (for instance, a «Vesna» activist Elena Skvortsova was expelled from Saint-Petersburg State University for not completing a mandatory internship that the university failed to provide for her).

15. Additionally, when students refuse to participate in the aforementioned «Talks about what is important» or other pro-war events since they oppose the forced narrative and are willing to stand up for their rights, they are disciplined to the point of expulsion. This is what happened to 17 students of the Kunta-Khadji Russian Islamic University in Chechnya for refusing to participate in a demonstration in support of «referendums» on the annexation of Ukrainian territories to Russia. Moreover, the expulsion of male students from colleges and universities automatically makes them eligible for conscription and since September 2022 — mobilisation. Therefore, it acts as another deterring factor and imposes a chilling effect on the freedom of expression in Russia.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

16. It is thus clear that the Russian authorities do not simply refuse special protection to child and young human rights defenders, but instead persecute them for their work and activism. Since the invasion of Ukraine, this pressure has

been particularly intense. The authorities have created conditions in which it is impossible to express an alternative opinion on the issue of war and human rights without repercussions.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

17. States should adopt the following measures to prevent persecution and improve the protection of child and youth human rights defenders:

- Develop legal provisions and mechanisms to protect the rights of child and youth human rights defenders;
- Adopt policy guidelines on ensuring child and youth human rights defenders' rights.

18. States should adopt the following measures to prevent persecution and improve the protection of children and youth exercising their rights:

- Stop justifying persecution for peaceful views and protests by invoking the protection of children's rights;
- Enshrine in law the prohibition of the involvement of people, especially children, in public events against their will, along with penalties for non-participation;
- Develop a state policy to combat the problem of pressure from government officials and educational institutions on minors participating in protests and expressing views;
- Develop instructions or training for police on how to deal with minors and their parents during searches and interrogations.

19. States should adopt the following measures to ensure that children's and youth's right to education are properly realised:

- Refrain from propaganda in schools and other educational institutions;
- Ensure children's access to a wide range of alternative sources of information;
- Develop and implement human rights education programmes in educational institutions.

## Ещё почитать



### **«А люди полностью отданы СВО». Рассказ волонтера, на которого составили восемь протоколов за встречи с жителями Курской области**

Роман Солодов хотел привлечь внимание власти к бедам жителей российских приграничных сел. Но вместо этого его самого привлекли к ответственности.



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### **Что такое «оправдание терроризма» и как за него преследуют?**

В рейтинге уголовных статей, по которым россиян преследуют за антивоенные высказывания, первую строчку в 2024 году статья о публичных призывах, оправдании или пропаганде терроризма...

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### **Игорь Якуничев нуждается в медпомощи!**

36-летний житель поселка Пангоды Ямало-Ненецкого автономного округа и автор ютуб-канала «Бесконечность

не предел» Игорь Якуничев находится в СИЗО-5  
Екатеринбурга по уголовному делу о «военных фейках»,...

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высказывания и критику войны в Украине**

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