

Human Rights Watch Concerns and Recommendations on Russia
Prepared to Assist the Human Rights Committee Draw Up the List of Issues for the Review of
Russia
July 6, 2020

In light of the Human Rights Committee's upcoming pre-sessional review of Russia, we urge the Committee's to raise two issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic that we hope will inform the Committee's consideration of the Russian government's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The concerns described below derive from our ongoing research on the Russian government's response to Covid-19.

1. Health Workers' Rights in Covid-19 (Covenant articles 6 and 19)

Human Rights Watch research found that [health workers in Russia face threats and retaliation](#) from employers and law enforcement for speaking out about unsafe working conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. These include a lack of adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) to safely treat suspected or confirmed patients and prevent the spread of disease. In some regions, such health workers [appeared to have been forced to retract their statements](#). [Others](#) were fired, faced repeated disciplinary measures, or administrative charges that carried large fines, or were forced to sign documents saying they would not disclose information about hospital conditions.

Human Rights Watch research suggested that while workers in ambulance brigades and hospitals working exclusively with Covid-19 patients reported increased supplies of personal protective equipment by May 2020, other health professionals reported having less protection despite having regular contact with patients showing Covid-19 symptoms. The data on mortality among health workers remains problematic. At the end of May, the Health Ministry stated that [101 health workers](#) died from Covid-19, but as of June 12 an unofficial estimate was [406](#). On June 18, the head of the Russian supervisory body in the healthcare sector publicly stated that [486 health workers](#) have died from Covid-19, but the same day, the same agency [refuted](#) the statement as "unofficial statistics".

- We encourage the Committee to ask the government what steps it is taking to proactively ensure that health workers can speak out without fear of retaliation about the safety of their work conditions, including access to PPE, and to investigate cases in which health workers may have been wrongfully disciplined or prosecuted in retaliation for exercising their rights to freedom of expression
- We encourage the Committee to ask the government what measures it is taking to a) ensure that all health facilities receive equipment that is essential to protect the lives of health workers from Covid-19, and b) to ensure that health facilities have the tools necessary to accurately provide the government data on their PPE needs.

- We encourage the Committee ask the government to provide comprehensive data on compensation to health workers who died or were infected due to lack of PPE or other unsafe working conditions.

2. Indefinite Detention of Migrants (Covenant articles 7, 9, 10, 14 and 17)

Human Rights Watch [research has highlighted the plight of more than 8,000 people](#), including families with children, who are effectively being held in indefinite migration detention across Russia because of the near-total shutdown in international travel due to Covid-19.

Research suggests that migrants are placed in those centers through two distinct procedures – through deportation, which is an extrajudicial process, and is based on a decision of migration police; or through expulsion, which is mandated by court. In some cases, migrants had no recourse to due process, including in judicial processes, due to lack of access to adequate legal aid or interpretation.

In some, if not in most, detention centers, the conditions of detention may amount to inhuman and degrading treatment due to overcrowding, non-compliance with sanitation standards, lack of natural light. Some detainees report having to take food in their cells, including in proximity to toilets. Detainees with previous criminal records, including for violent crimes share cells with those without prior criminal records.

Experts have found that conditions in migration detention facilities [are worse](#) than in Russia's pretrial detention facilities or prisons. Access to medical care is especially problematic. In some cases, the only medical assistance available is limited to what may lawfully performed by a nurse practitioner. Furthermore, only one nurse practitioner is allocated per center. Several sources also reported shortages of basic medications and serious deficiencies in the treatment of [infectious diseases](#).

[Multiple cases](#) before the European Court of Human Rights have confirmed that for years Russia has detained indefinitely people who cannot be removed from the country, violating the prohibition on arbitrary detention and other guarantees of liberty and security. Since 2014, the European Court has issued [18 such rulings against Russia](#), which still have not been implemented, despite [Russian Constitutional Court confirming](#) the European Court's position that indefinite detention is not permissible. The European Court also [ruled](#) that conditions in Russian migration detention centers amount to inhumane and degrading treatment.

- We encourage the Committee to ask the government:
 - What steps it took to fulfill the March 25 recommendation by the [United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture](#) to reduce populations in detention centers “to the lowest possible level” and what steps it took to place detainees in alternative settings that facilitate their protection from Covid-19

- What measures it took to ensure that conditions of detention comply with international standards, in particular as regards overcrowding, poor sanitation, placement of persons with no previous criminal records together with convicted criminals;
- What measures it took to ensure family unity in the context of migration detention and removals to prevent separation of children from their parents and how the best interest of children is incorporated into detention and removal procedures.
- What measures it took to address the racial profiling by police.
- What measures it took to ensure that persons who cannot be removed imminently, including in the context of de jure or de facto statelessness are not trapped in the situation of detention of indefinite duration.
- We encourage the Committee to ask the government to clarify its [announced plans to develop and make it mandatory](#) for migrant workers entering Russia to install software on mobile devices that would contain among other things, information on their health status and biometric data and that would, on the basis of their “digital profile,” assign them a “trustworthiness” rating.