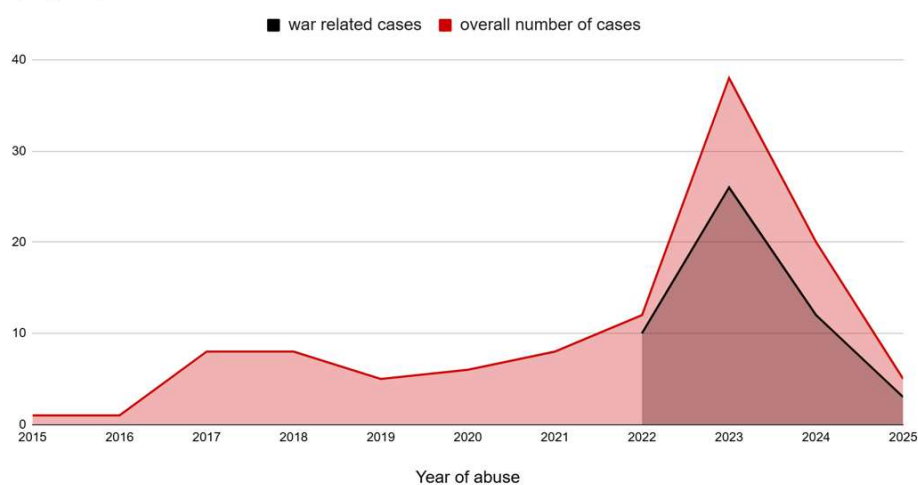


Political abuse of psychiatry in Russia September 1, 2025

According to our monitoring, since 2015, there have been 112 cases of abuse involving 109 victims in Russia, with three individuals targeted twice.

Political abuse of psychiatry in Russia in relation to the war, 2015-2025*

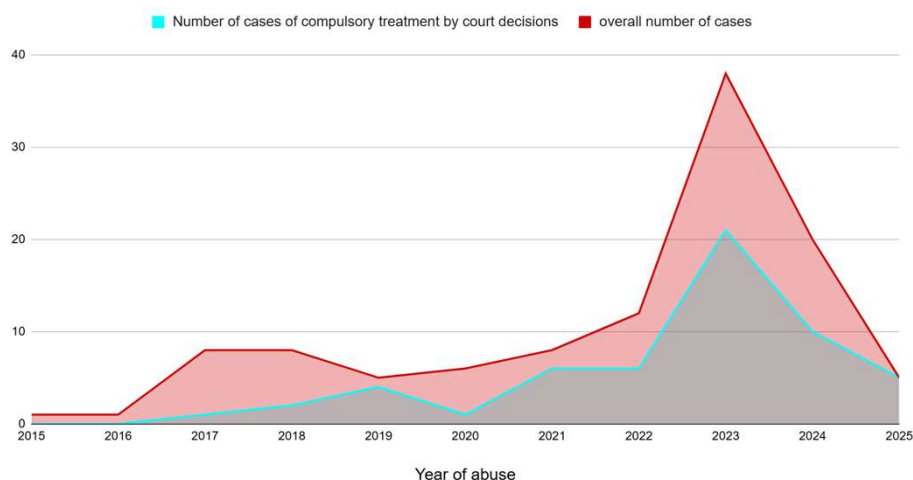
*By August 31, 2025



The highest number of politically motivated psychiatric abuse cases was recorded in 2023, with 38 documented incidents. Of these, 26 were related to protests against the war in Ukraine, and 22 resulted in court-ordered involuntary hospitalization.

Political abuse of psychiatry in Russia in relation to court decisions, 2015-2025*

*By August 31, 2025

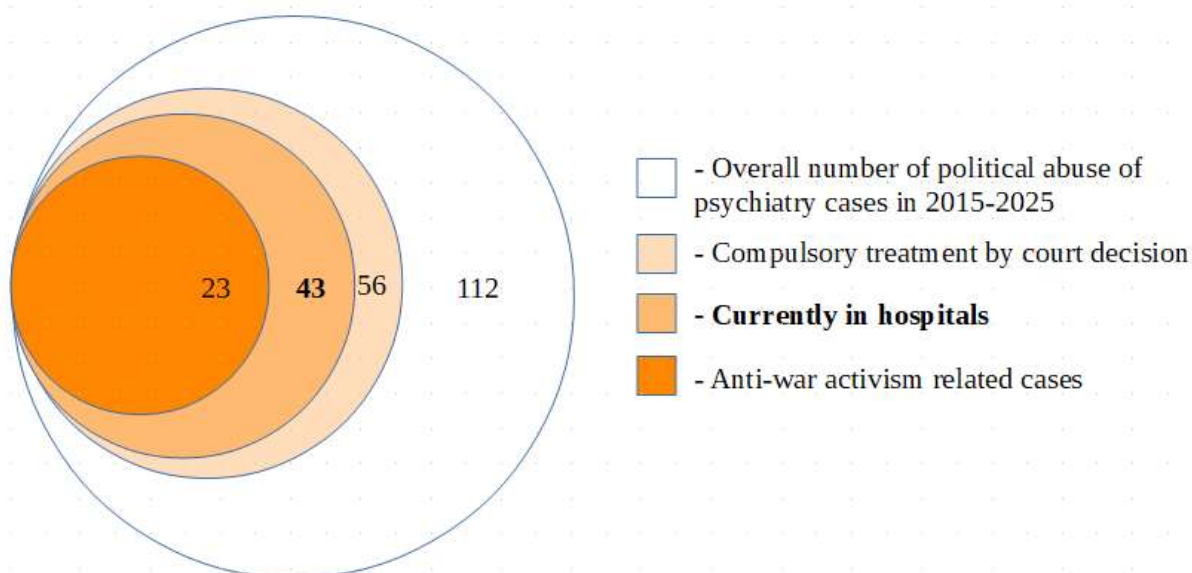


Since that peak, the overall number of identified cases has declined, while the proportion ending in court-ordered hospitalization has continued to rise. Given the broader intensification of repression, it is unlikely that the actual prevalence of such cases has decreased to the same extent as reflected in the available data. The reasons for this statistical discrepancy are discussed below.

Number of people currently hospitalized by court decisions

Current hospitalization in comparison to overall number of cases*

*by August 31, 2025



We understand political abuse of psychiatry as encompassing a spectrum of practices. At one end are threats from investigators to place detainees in psychiatric facilities, or cases where individuals are admitted to hospitals merely because police consider their behavior troublesome. At the other end are more severe measures, such as ordering inpatient forensic evaluations that could reasonably have been performed on an outpatient basis, or court decisions declaring individuals legally incompetent, resulting in their involuntary placement in psychiatric hospitals for unlimited periods of time.

As of August 31, 2025, we have recorded 56 court rulings ordering involuntary psychiatric treatment since 2015. Currently, 43 individuals remain hospitalized, 23 of whom were accused of anti-war activities.



One of such cases is the one of civil activist **Oleg Savvin** from Kaliningrad who was declared legally incompetent in July, 2025 and transferred to the Psychiatric Hospital of the Kaliningrad Region for writing a comment on a social network.

The story started in March 2014, when Ukrainian Crimea had not yet been formally annexed, but some Russian flags were already appearing there, Oleg, along with two other activists, carried out a provocative protest action in Kaliningrad against the policy of the Russian Federation toward Ukraine: they hung the flag of the Federal Republic

of Germany on a building belonging to the FSB. The activists were quickly arrested and accused of actions that insult veterans and are separatist in nature.

A clear illustration of the hypocrisy of the Russian regime, which at that very time was annexing part of a sovereign state, cost Savvin one year and one month of imprisonment under the verdict for Part 2 of Article 213 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("Hooliganism motivated by political hatred or enmity, committed by a group of persons by prior agreement").

After his release, Oleg did not stop protesting — he continued to hold pickets, including for the release of Oleg Sentsov.

In March 2025, Savvin was arrested again because of a comment on the social network VKontakte, which he had posted in 2022.

Lawyer **Maria Bonzler** said that a criminal case had not been initiated against Oleg for so long because the investigation, which had been monitoring him for a long time, lacked materials: "there were only reposts, but they dug and found a three-year-old comment."

The actual comment is the following:

"It can be stated with full confidence that the essence of the Kremlin's full-scale aggression against Ukraine is not only anti-human but anti-vital in principle. Russian military forces are committing not just crimes against humanity but also crimes against the planet Earth and the life currently inhabiting it. Brutally killing people, bringing suffering, numerous personal and family tragedies, destroying cities, their infrastructure, life-support systems, and landmarks, they are also causing large-scale environmental

damage, harming animals and plant life, becoming the cause of impending famine for people living in other parts of the world, and openly threatening the use of the nuclear arsenal (in addition to the fact that they already dug trenches, seized facilities, and conducted combat operations in the Chernobyl exclusion zone — one should also not forget about the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant). Do those calling to ‘nuke it’ even understand what a nuclear explosion (in Orcish language, a ‘pop’) means — radioactive contamination of territory, and the consequences of that?”

Savvin was accused of violating Clause "d" of Part 2 of Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("Public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, motivated by political and ideological hatred or enmity," punishable by up to 10 years of imprisonment).

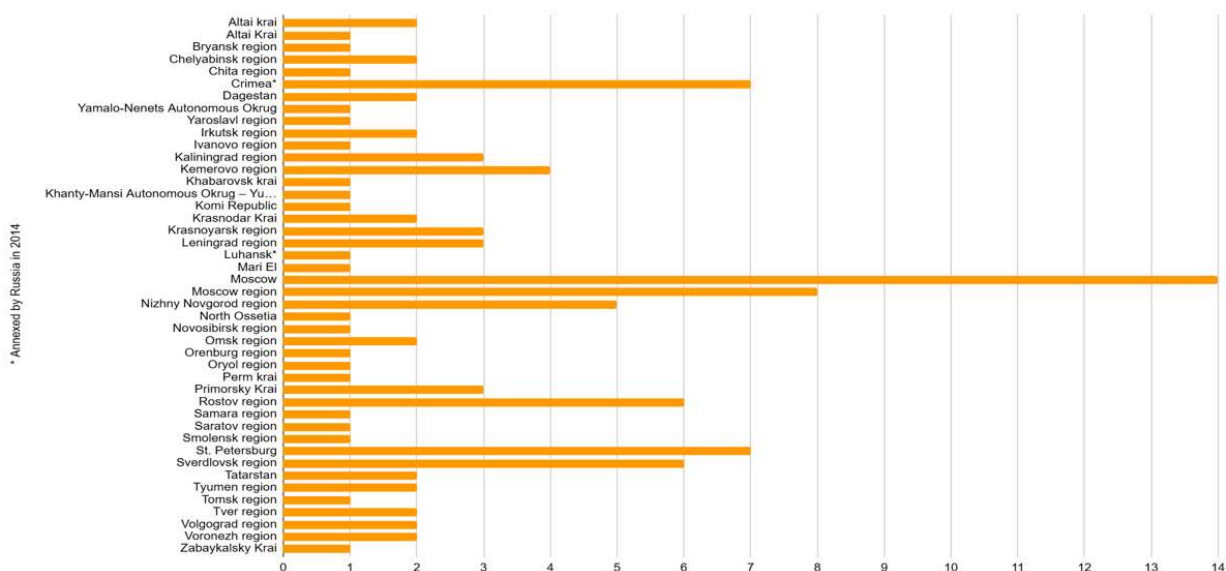
In May, 2025 Savvin’s lawyer Maria Bonzler was arrested herself (see more below). On July 20, 2025, Savvin’s new lawyer, Alexander Chauzov, reported that the Leningradsky Court of Kaliningrad had declared him legally incompetent and temporarily transferred him from the pre-trial detention center to the Psychiatric Hospital of the Kaliningrad Region (under Article 435 of the Criminal Procedure Code). The decision was made on the basis of a forensic psychiatric examination that diagnosed Savvin with a mental disorder.

Geographical distribution

The geographical distribution of cases of politically motivated misuse of psychiatry has remained largely unchanged: Moscow and the Moscow region continue to account for the highest number of cases, followed by Russian-annexed Crimea.

Abuse of Psychiatry in Russia in 2015-2025 by REGION

As of August 31, 2025

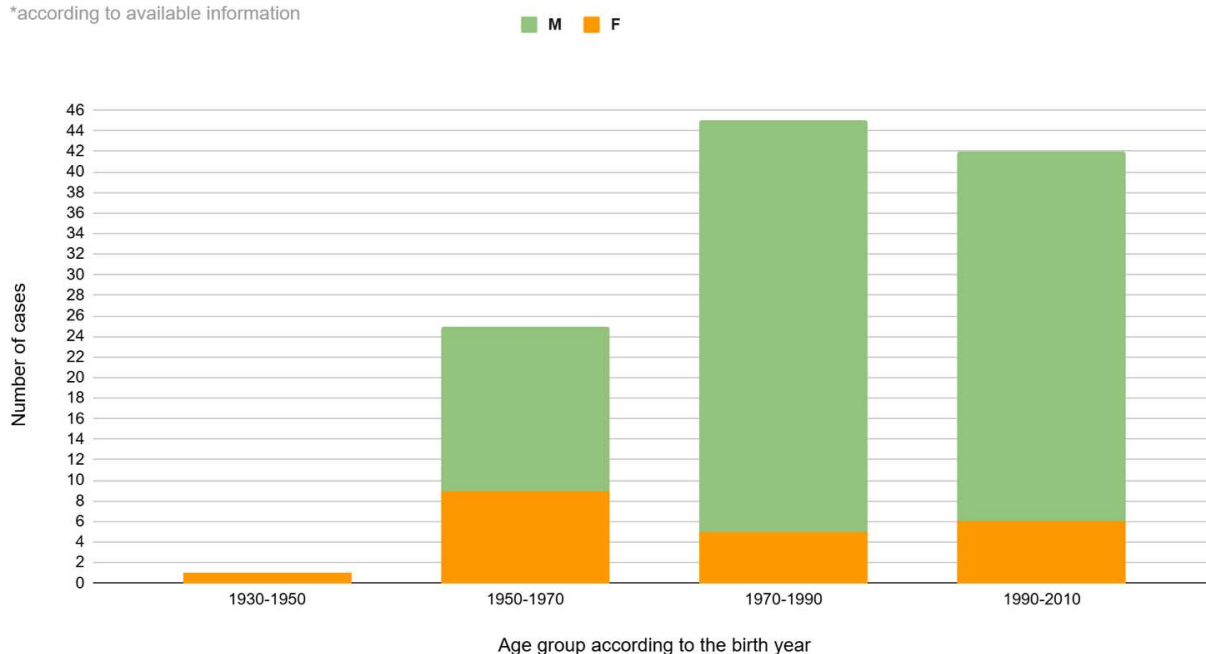


Age and gender distribution

In our previous report of November 2024, we noted an increase in the number of young people born between 1990 and 2010, compared with the middle-aged group born between 1970 and 1990, among those targeted by politically motivated psychiatric abuse. This year, however, the middle-aged group once again represents the larger share. As before, there are significantly more men among the victims.

Victims of the political abuse of psychiatry in Russia by age group and gender* as of August 31, 2025

*according to available information



One of them is **Grigory Ivanenko**, born in 1985, a resident of Saint Petersburg, previously of Krasnoyarsk, and before that, of Taishet (Irkutsk Region). His case vividly illustrates what the Russian authorities consider to be madness.

In February 2021, Ivanenko threw a firecracker at the car of a Krasnoyarsk official and was convicted of hooliganism involving an object used as a weapon (Part 2 of Article 213 of the Criminal Code). He was sentenced to two years in prison. The court relied on a psychiatric evaluation, which found that Ivanenko showed signs of "paranoid personality disorder," but

not of a mental illness that would have deprived him of the ability to fully understand the nature or danger of his actions or to control them. This conclusion was based on his medical history and the experts' own observations, which listed such personality traits as "categorical judgments," "inflated self-esteem," "a certain demonstrativeness," "subjectivity in assessing situations and others' actions," "a tendency to set himself apart from others," "a meticulous concern for individual rights," and "distrust toward others and suspicion of their motives." Ivanenko was released in August 2023. About a year later, on May 29, 2024, he allegedly (according to investigators) posted flyers on the building of a Saint Petersburg military enlistment office. The flyers depicted a man in a prison uniform and described him as a wanted state criminal, with the following description: "A pompous dwarf, loud, vindictive, extremely dismissive of others' opinions. Known by the nicknames: VVP [Putin's initials], Latrine Undertaker [a reference to Putin's notorious threats to 'waste terrorists in the outhouse'], Kabaev [a play on the surname of Putin's alleged partner], Alpha Male, Great Pu, and Botox [a mocking allusion to his appearance]."

A few days later, Ivanenko was arrested and charged with politically motivated hooliganism (subparagraph "b" of Part 1 of Article 213 of the Criminal Code), as law enforcement identified the described "criminal" as President Putin.

He was sent for a forensic psychiatric evaluation. According to report No. 357/1944 dated September 10, 2024, "Grigory Anatolyevich Ivanenko suffers from a chronic mental disorder in the form of chronic delusional disorder (ICD-10 code G22.08). This conclusion is supported by his medical history, materials from the criminal case, medical records, and the findings of this evaluation. Since approximately 2016, he has exhibited delusional symptoms, including delusions of entitlement, which led to an active campaign for the restoration of supposedly violated justice, obsessive litigation, and the development of persistent interpretive delusions involving persecution, special significance, and imagined physical and material harm."

On June 30, 2025, Judge Lidiya Pryanichnikova of the Krasnoselsky District Court of Saint Petersburg relieved Ivanenko of criminal responsibility and ordered compulsory treatment in a specialized inpatient psychiatric facility. The human rights project Memorial has recognized Ivanenko as a political prisoner.

Underreporting problem

Our monitoring relies solely on open sources (partly to avoid publishing unverified claims, since we cannot gather reliable information on the ground). As a result, we often learn about cases of abuse only months or even years later, which inevitably leads to underreporting.



One such case is that of Maksym Butkevych (b. 1977), a Ukrainian journalist and prominent human rights defender, co-founder of the organizations No Borders and ZMINA. After Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, he volunteered for the Ukrainian army. On June 24, 2022, he was captured at the front line.

In March 2023, a court of the self-proclaimed "Luhansk People's Republic" sentenced him to 13 years in a high-security penal colony on fabricated charges of attempted murder, use of prohibited warfare methods, and property destruction. His "confession" had been extracted under threats

of death, although at the time of the alleged crime he was in Kyiv on leave.

During the so-called investigation, he was subjected to a coerced psychiatric evaluation, carried out in the presence of masked Russian security forces who threatened him.

Butkevych later recalled in an interview with Zeit that he was pressured to sign anything they demanded, under the promise of early exchange—or face renewed torture.

After more than two years in captivity, on October 18, 2024, Maksym Butkevych finally returned to Ukraine in a prisoner-of-war exchange.

The Violation of Lawyers' Rights as a Possible Cause of Underreporting

In April 2025, the Federal Chamber of Lawyers of the Russian Federation issued recommendations to defense lawyers handling cases of involuntary psychiatric hospitalization. Among other points, the guidelines emphasized the need to inform clients of their right to confidential meetings with their attorneys. According to Yuri Ershov, the lawyer who authored the recommendations, Russian courts hear up to 20,000 such cases annually, and many individuals challenging hospitalization orders are not even aware that a lawyer has been appointed to represent them. Ershov further noted that "these cases accumulate in psychiatric hospitals to be considered in a kind of express mode — sometimes 20 to 30 cases in half a day." (<https://fparf.ru/news/fpa/dokument-vyglyadit-krayne-aktualnym-i-znachimym/>)

Research conducted by the Russian human rights project *First Department* indicates that the most frequent violation of lawyers' rights in Russia is the denial of access to their clients. (<https://dept.one/story/monitoring2024/>) The second most common abuse is the criminal prosecution of the lawyers themselves.

Our data may therefore be significantly underestimated — a possibility we have long acknowledged — and the degree of underreporting may now be even greater than before. With repression intensifying nationwide, there is little reason to assume that Russian psychiatrists, investigators, or courts have suddenly begun to respond to the concerns raised by human rights defenders, journalists, or civic groups. The shortage of reliable information is more plausibly explained by the limited number of defense lawyers in Russia, the systematic restrictions imposed on their access to clients, and the prosecutions and harassment they themselves face. Historically, lawyers have been the primary source of information in such cases.



One illustrative case is that of Kaliningrad lawyer Maria Bonzler, who represented participants in protest actions, including anti-war demonstrations. Bonzler also defended Kaliningrad activist Oleg Savvin, whose case was described above. On 28 May 2025, her home was searched, and she was detained on charges of alleged confidential cooperation with a foreign state or international organization. The Investigative Committee claimed that in 2024 Bonzler had passed information about security officials in Kaliningrad Oblast to the intelligence services of an "unfriendly state," information she had obtained in the course of her professional work. On 29 May 2025, she was placed in pre-trial detention.

Law amendments

In July 2025, the Russian Ministry of Health adopted Order No. 392-n, which significantly modified the rules on mandatory psychiatric examinations for employees. In short, employers now have the authority to initiate referrals, introducing potential administrative discretion. These amendments will enter into force on 1 March 2026 and remain valid until 1 September 2028.

Previously, employees in certain professions (e.g., teachers, drivers, security staff) were subject to compulsory psychiatric evaluations every five years, regardless of their actual health status. Employers had no independent role in initiating such examinations.

Following the amendment, the automatic "every five years" rule has been abolished. Employees will instead undergo regular periodic medical examinations, which are routine health check-ups required for various professions. These examinations typically include assessments by a general practitioner, basic laboratory tests, and consultations with relevant specialists. During these routine examinations, if a doctor notices signs of a possible mental disorder, the employer formally issues a referral for a psychiatric evaluation. In addition, employees with access to state secrets are excluded from the mandatory list.

The motives behind such decisions remain opaque, as in Russia most governmental actions are adopted without a plausible public explanation. However, it is conceivable that the reform could affect political opponents, since the combination of employer discretion and medical discretion could be applied to target individuals for reasons unrelated to genuine health concerns.

Another potential target could be military personnel and veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Speculatively, the aim may be to remove from society certain individuals whose behavior has become dangerous.