

1.4. Surveillance of the population

1.4. Surveillance of the population

In an interview with the EUAA, a human rights lawyer noted that the spread of surveillance technologies in Russia has significantly accelerated since the Covid-19 pandemic. The country's surveillance system has become largely automated due to the widespread use of facial recognition technology and an extensive camera network operating in major cities. According to the source, this technological expansion has been actively supported by the Russian business sector, with banks and transportation companies actively adopting new technologies.96 For example, facial recognition technology is integrated into the Face Pay biometric payment system, which allows passengers to link their photo with their bank and metro cards to pay for travel.97 First launched in Moscow's underground in October 2021,98 Face Pay was introduced between August 2024 and March 2025 in several other cities, including Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, 99 Yekaterinburg,100 Samara,101 and St. Petersburg.102

The Russian authorities have used closed-circuit television surveillance cameras (CCTV) to identify and detain individuals participating in anti-government protests, as well as journalists covering them.103 On 4 July 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) noted in a case regarding the arrest of a solo protestor identified through social media and CCTV in the Moscow underground that facial-recognition technology installed in Moscow violated Article 8 (right to respect for private life) of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention.104

In July 2024, the media outlet Eurasianet reported that, according to the Ministry of Digital Development, Russia had more than one million CCTV cameras installed in various cities, including around 230 000 cameras in Moscow, with one third connected to a facial recognition system.105 Several people who attended the funeral of Alexei Navalny on 1 March 2024 were detained in the days following the event, reportedly after being identified through CCTV footage or online videos of the memorial.106

According to a human rights lawyer, surveillance is more extensive in large cities and wealthier regions with the resources to invest in the necessary infrastructure. For instance, the Republic of Tatarstan has long been a leader in adopting surveillance technologies. Along with Moscow, Tatarstan operates the Safe City program, which integrates video surveillance into a unified system, including the cameras installed at the entrances of residential buildings. In contrast, poorer regions of Russia have fewer technological capabilities for surveillance.107 The Safe City program is also operational in St. Petersburg, which has 102 000 CCTV cameras.108 As reported by The Insider, in August 2025, around 50 000 cameras in the city were equipped with an

ethnicity recognition function, which the city authorities aim to use to ‘monitor gatherings of immigrants.’109

In August 2024, the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto and international non-profit organisation Access Now reported that since 2022110 hackers linked to Russian intelligence had been engaged in a global phishing email campaign against prominent opposition figures in exile, as well as international NGOs and media, using malicious emails to steal credentials.111 Inside Russia, the law requires internet service providers (ISPs) to install equipment that enables security services to monitor internet traffic in real time and share users’ geolocation data.112

Russian nationals returning to Russia from abroad reportedly face questioning upon crossing the border.113 As noted by Ivan Pavlov, founder of Department One114 and several other human rights groups, in an interview with the EUAA, individuals returning to Russia ‘are of interest to the special services.’ The source noted that if a person has been away for an extended time, border officials may question them upon arrival at the airport, checking also mobile phones, banking apps, and social media accounts.115 In an interview with EUAA, a representative of independent human rights project OVD-Info116 noted that border guards ‘seem to have some kind of databases and lists,’ but OVD-Info does not have information about their content. The source further noted several potential ‘risk factors’, such as holding Ukrainian citizenship or having an activist background. They added that some criminal cases seem to have been initiated after officials inspected individual’s mobile phone at the border – for instance, when financial transactions to funds possible associated with Ukraine were discovered.117

- 96

  Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 23 October 2025

- 97

  Lithuania, National Threat Assessment, State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, March 2025, url, p. 26

- 98

  Reuters, Moscow says it is first to launch large-scale metro facial ID payment system, 15 October 2021, url

- 99

  RFE/RL, ‘Significant Risk As Facial Recognition In Russia’s Subways Goes Regional, 13 September 2024, url; ID Tech, Moscow Aims to Deploy Face Pay at All Metro Turnstiles by End of Year, 17 July 2025, url

- 100

  Russia, Informacionny portal Sverdlovskoy oblasti, Оплатить поездку в метро при помощи улыбки можно на всех станциях Екатеринбурга [You can pay for your metro journey with a smile at all stations in Yekaterinburg], 11 November 2025, url

- 101

  Russia, Obyedinennaya transportanya karta, Оплата улыбкой доступна [Payment by smile is available], n.d., url

- 102

  RBC, В петербургском метро запустили новый вид оплаты проезда [A new type of fare payment has been launched in the St. Petersburg metro], 4 March 2025, url

- 103

  RFE/RL, ‘Significant Risk As Facial Recognition In Russia’s Subways Goes Regional, 13 September 2024, url

- 104

  ECHR, Use of facial-recognition technology breached rights of Moscow underground protestor, 4 July 2023, url

- 105

  Eurasianet, Russia: How the Kremlin is using AI to enhance video surveillance, 4 July 2024, url

- 106

  Meduza, Russian authorities using video footage to identify and arrest people who attended Navalny’s funeral, 5 March 2025, url

- 107

  Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 23 October 2025

- 108

  Moscow Times (The), St. Petersburg to Introduce Ethnicity Recognition Software CCTV Cameras, 20 February 2025, url

- 109

  Insider (The), St. Petersburg rolls out cameras allegedly capable of recognizing the “ethnic affiliation” of passersby, 26 August 2025, url

- 110

  Reuters, Russia’s critics targeted with global hacking campaign, rights group says, 14 August 2024, url

- 111

Guardian (The), Russia launching more sophisticated phishing attacks, new report finds, 14 August 2024, url

- 112

  Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2024, n.d., url

- 113

  DW, Russia intensifies border scrutiny for dissidents, 14 March 2024, url; OVD-Info, Online interview with EUAA, 21 October 2025

- 114

  Department one (Russian: *Pervy otdel*) is a community of lawyers and journalists in Russia who report on court cases and provide legal aid, see, Pervy otdel, Kto my takie [Who we are], url

- 115

  Ivan Pavlov, Online interview with EUAA, 10 October 2025

- 116

  OVD-Info is an independent human rights project, which was founded in 2011 and works on the ground in Russia, providing legal aid, engaging in advocacy, and collecting data on political repressions in the country, see OVD-Info, About us, n.d., url. The person interviewed by EUAA preferred to remain anonymous for security reasons and is referred to as OVD-Info.

- 117

  OVD-Info, Online interview with EUAA, 21 October 2025

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu