

3.6.1. Jehovah’s Witnesses

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Since the classification of Jehovah’s Witnesses as an extremist organisation, and therefore the banning of its activities, in April 2017,[449] the authorities have engaged in ‘a protracted campaign’ against the community,[450] which involves arbitrary arrests,[451] confiscation of property, surveillance, and torture.[452] At the time of the ban in 2017, there were around 170 000[453] – 175 000 of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia.[454]

As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur, Mariana Katzarova, the prosecution of the community affected nearly 1 000 people, with many facing mistreatment in detention, including torture and ‘denial of adequate medical care.’[455] In October 2025, the ECHR upheld its June 2022 opinion, finding that prosecution and conviction of Jehovah’s witnesses for peacefully practicing their religion were ‘based on the impermissibly broad formulation and application of the extremism legislation,’ while the authorities failed to prove that they were ‘involved in any socially dangerous activities of an extremist nature.’[456]

As noted by the Oslo-based human rights organisation Forum 18,[457] even before a court trial takes place, investigations usually add individuals to the list of ‘terrorists and extremists’ maintained by the Rosfinmonitoring, which carries significant financial implications, such as the freezing of bank accounts, with exceptions allowed only for small transactions.[458] Furthermore, at least five Jehovah’s Witnesses who had acquired Russian citizenship by naturalisation had their citizenship revoked due to their criminal convictions, with three of them being ‘subsequently expelled from Russia.’[459]

a) Law enforcement practices

As reported by Forum 18, authorities continued the practice of conducting raids on the homes of Jehovah’s Witnesses. These raids are usually conducted by the Investigative Committee or the FSB, both of whom are ‘usually responsible’ for investigating Jehovah’s Witnesses after their inclusion into the list of extremist organisations, and often involve the National Guard.[460] During home searches, law enforcement officers seize electronic devices, mobile phones,[461] as well as personal notes and Bibles.[462] During home searches in Saratov oblast, wives and children of believers were also reportedly questioned.[463] From 1 September 2025 to 21 October 2025, the FSB and Investigative Committee conducted at least 37 raids on households in five Russian regions.[464]

According to SOVA Research Center, in 2024, searches of Jehovah's Witnesses' homes were ‘often accompanied by violations, including use of violence against believers.’[465] As reported by Forum 18 in October 2025, the FSB and other agencies used physical abuse, inhumane treatment, and threats during raids and interrogations. Moreover, according to the same source, in some cases, law enforcement officers reportedly used torture during interrogations and in some prison facilities.[466] In September 2025, in Saratov, National Guard officers[467] repeatedly used electroshock device against a 58-year-old man while conducting searches at his house before arresting him,[468] with none of them being investigated or held accountable.[469]

(b) Prosecutions and convictions

According to data from Jehovah’s Witnesses, as of October 2025, 883 persons have been prosecuted by the Russian authorities, with almost all of them (882 persons) for organising an extremist organisation, participating in such organisation, or recruiting others to it.[470] This number includes 33 persons prosecuted in illegally annexed Crimea.[471] Among 633 court verdicts, 202 were prison sentences, 320 suspended sentences, and 95 fines.[472] Furthermore, in 26 cases, the charges were withdrawn, and two cases ended with acquittals.[473]

According to the same source, 49 cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses were initiated in 2024[474] and 28 cases were recorded from 1 January 2025 to 3 October 2025.[475] Of these cases (77 in total), 15 persons were convicted, 31 face a trial, and 27 have been formally charged. There were no instances of charges being dropped in this period.[476] Moreover, as of October 2025, 169 Jehovah’s Witnesses were deprived of liberty due to detention in various facilities, including penal colonies and pre-trial detention centres. Furthermore, at least 494 members of the community have faced detention, including short-term detentions. [477]

As noted by OVD-Info, a typical case against Jehovah’s witnesses is against persons who organise small home gatherings for community members.[478] In January 2025, a Russian-appointed court in Crimea sentenced two men to six years in prison on charges for conducting and participating in worship gatherings.[479] In April 2025, a person in Chelyabinsk was similarly sentenced to six years in prison. As reported by Reuters, a local interior ministry reported that the investigation against this person involved the FSB, counter-extremism investigators, and a special unit of the National Guard (*Rosgvardiya*) who seized the person’s computer hard drives, electronic devices, and handwritten notebooks containing religious content.[480] In September 2025, in Saransk, the capital of the Republic of Mordovia, two Jehovah’s Witnesses were sentenced to six and a half and seven years in prison respectively for holding religious meetings, engaging in preaching activities in the city, and distributing extremist literature.[481]

In October 2025, courts convicted at least four Jehovah’s Witnesses, with one of them being sentenced to 7 years in prison and two others receiving a suspended sentence.[482] The same month, an appellate court turned a suspended sentence of six years and six months imprisonment into an actual prison term after an appeal by a state prosecutor.[483]

A human rights lawyer noted that Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse legal assistance, believing that enduring trials is a test from God, therefore it is not possible to provide them with legal aid, as they decline any help.[484]

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