

European Rights Court Orders Russia to Pay Damages to Domestic Abuse Victims

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Margarita Gracheva. **Alexander Shcherbak / TASS**

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has [ordered](#) Russia to compensate four victims of domestic abuse, including a woman whose jealous ex-husband chopped off her hands with an axe.

In 2017, Russian lawmakers scrapped criminal punishment for first-time abusers whose beatings result in “minor harm.” Attempts to pass a law aimed at protecting women from domestic violence have largely stalled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Women in Russia are in a situation of de facto discrimination” when it comes to protection against the risk of domestic violence, the ECHR said in a statement Tuesday.

Russia had not only failed to investigate domestic violence cases, but also to establish a legal framework to combat domestic abuse and assess the risks of recurrent violence, the

Strasbourg-based court added.

In one gruesome high-profile case, police officers urged Margarita Gracheva to withdraw her complaint against her husband.

Weeks later, the husband kidnapped Gracheva, tied her up and hacked off her hands with an axe in a forest. He was sentenced to 14 years in maximum-security prison on charges of kidnapping and inflicting grave bodily harm.

Gracheva's attempts to sue the police officer for professional negligence went nowhere.

Doctors managed to reattach her left hand, and she received a bionic prosthesis for her right hand.

The ECHR ordered Russia to pay Gracheva 370,660 euros (\$419,000) for medical expenses, loss of income and non-pecuniary damage.

"The prosecutor found no causal link between the inspector's actions and the assault on her. The supervising prosecutor did not restart the investigation, claiming that he had been unable to contact the inspector," the ECHR said.

The court also ordered Russia to pay 25,000 euros each to three other victims of domestic abuse: Natalia Tunkova, Yelena Gershman and Irina Petrakova.

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