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Introduction

This briefing has been prepared as input to the EU–Kazakhstan Human Rights Dialogue scheduled for March 2026. It provides information on key issues concerning the protection of civic space and the freedoms of expression, association and assembly, drawing on ongoing cooperation between International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR) in monitoring and documenting developments in these areas. It also highlights individual cases involving civil society activists, opposition supporters, human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers who have faced persecution.

The CIVICUS Monitor, a global initiative tracking civic freedoms with which IPHR and KIBHR cooperate, currently classifies Kazakhstan’s civic space as “repressed”, assigning it a score of 30 on a scale from 0 (worst) to 100 (best). When updated global ratings were released in December 2025, Kazakhstan’s score had slightly declined by one point compared with the previous year, reflecting the ongoing alarming situation for civic space in the country.¹

Following its review of Kazakhstan’s compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in June 2025, the UN Human Rights Committee issued important recommendations on addressing shortcomings in the protection of the freedoms of expression, association and assembly.² Similarly, during Kazakhstan’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in January 2025, UN member states raised concerns about ongoing restrictions in these areas and called for improvements.³ A national action plan for the implementation of the recommendations received during the UN reviews is currently under preparation.

We urge the EU, during its upcoming dialogue with Kazakhstan, to raise the issues described in this briefing and call for concrete measures to address violations, including by implementing recommendations received during the recent UN Human Rights Committee review and the UPR.

Political Modernisation and Constitutional Reform Process

In mid-January 2026, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev launched a constitutional reform presented as a new step toward political modernisation in Kazakhstan.⁴ The initiative follows earlier reforms introduced after the January 2022 events, which were officially aimed at rolling back the “super-presidential” system established under Tokayev’s predecessor, Nursultan Nazarbayev.⁵

A Constitutional Commission of 130 members was swiftly set up to prepare the reform.⁶ Within a short period, it produced a sweeping package of amendments affecting most provisions of the current constitution,⁷ with a first full draft presented on 31 January.⁸ Less than two weeks later, a final draft was published⁹ and a nationwide referendum scheduled for 15 March¹⁰, at which

voters will be asked to approve or reject the new constitution as a whole. If endorsed, the new constitution will enter into force on 1 July 2026.

Among other changes, the draft foresees merging the current two parliamentary chambers into a unicameral parliament elected through proportional representation, expanding parliamentary powers in certain areas, introducing the post of vice president, and establishing a new consultative People's Council with the right to initiate legislation.

However, commentators have expressed scepticism that these amendments will lead to genuine political reform, noting that key levers of power remain concentrated in the executive branch and that the political environment continues to prevent real opposition parties from participating in elections.¹¹ To date, the president's political modernisation drive has been seriously undermined by the lack of space for political pluralism, the suppression of open discussion on issues of public concern, and the persecution of critics and opponents – trends that, as this briefing shows, continue unabated.

Civil society organisations have also raised concerns about the rushed and non-transparent way the constitutional reform has been conducted, with few public associations invited to participate in the drafting process¹² and limited opportunities for meaningful public discussion. They warned that this approach risks undermining public trust and could lead to the new constitution being seen not as a stable foundation for a social contract, but rather as a tool for short-term political decision-making.¹³

In addition, human rights defenders have highlighted potentially negative implications of proposed provisions for human rights protection.¹⁴ Of particular concern is the omission of the current provision establishing that international treaties ratified by Kazakhstan take precedence over national law (Article 5). This contradicts key principles of international law, including those set out in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which stipulate that domestic law cannot be invoked to justify non-compliance with international obligations. Moreover, the draft constitution grants the Constitutional Court authority to review whether the implementation of decisions by international bodies complies with the constitution and provides that such decisions will not be executed if found inconsistent (Articles 73 and 75). These provisions could seriously undermine the implementation of international human rights treaties and decisions of international human rights mechanisms.

Human rights defenders have also raised concerns about new grounds for restricting human rights that go beyond those permitted under international law. In particular, the draft constitution introduces the broadly formulated concept of the “foundations of the constitutional order” and the undefined notion of “societal morality” as permissible justifications for limiting rights and freedoms (article 41).

In another worrying development, incidents of intimidation targeting bloggers and activists criticising the constitutional reforms have been reported¹⁵ (see also Freedom of Expression),

prompting fears that further attempts to stifle criticism may follow as the referendum draws closer.

Recommendations

The Kazakhstani authorities should:

- Ensure that no one who peacefully expresses or shares views on the constitutional reform is subjected to intimidation or harassment and promptly investigate any such cases and hold those responsible accountable.
- Publicly reaffirm that Kazakhstan will continue to comply in good faith with all international human rights treaties it has ratified and implement decisions of bodies supervising compliance with these treaties, regardless of changes in constitutional wording.
- Refrain from adopting or applying measures that restrict human rights in violation of international obligations, ensuring that any limitations are strictly in line with international human rights law.
- Continue political reforms with a view to fostering genuine political pluralism, transparent and accountable decision-making, and broad participation by political groups, civil society and the public.
- Ensure effective opportunities for civil society organisations and independent experts to contribute to lawmaking processes, including any future constitutional reforms, and facilitate inclusive public consultation procedures.

Freedom of Association

Hostile rhetoric against foreign-funded organisations, tightened oversight

The US presidential administration's overhaul of foreign assistance in 2025 prompted renewed verbal attacks against foreign-funded civil society organisations (CSOs) in Kazakhstan. In the past year, decision-makers – from MPs to President Tokayev – have repeatedly accused CSOs of using foreign grants to promote “alien” values and undermine the country's image.¹⁶

In February 2025, a member of a pro-government parliamentary faction proposed adopting a “foreign agent” law, arguing that it was time to “rewrite the rules of the game with foreign donors who disguise political interests as ‘media support,’ ‘human rights,’ and ‘increasing tolerance.’”¹⁷ Although this initiative did not advance, the government subsequently launched work on new general legislation on NGOs, with the Ministry of Culture and Information charged with coordinating the process. A working group established to develop the new legislation includes leaders of public associations, along with government officials, MPs and experts.¹⁸ While this is welcome, there are concerns that the views of independent civil society representatives may be sidelined in the process.¹⁹ At the time of writing, an initial policy document prepared by the working group remained under government review.

In the context of discussions about the alleged threats posed by foreign funding of CSOs,²⁰ the authorities have also tightened a reporting regime for organisations receiving foreign funding, citing concerns about transparency and national security. Under new rules that entered into force in January 2026²¹, organisations receiving foreign support for several, broadly worded purposes – including legal assistance and consultations, sociological and public surveys, and the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information – must now report both the receipt and use of these funds, whereas before it was sufficient to report only on the receipt. A public registry of legal entities and individuals receiving foreign funding,²² which human rights groups criticised as discriminatory and discrediting when it was first published in 2023,²³ will be expanded to include not only the names of recipients but also the sources and amounts of their funding. CSOs that fail to provide required information or are late in providing it could face fines.²⁴

In addition, the new Tax Code, which also took effect in January 2026, grants tax authorities expanded powers to inspect organisations receiving foreign funding for the stated purpose of overseeing their use of funds and ensuring compliance with tax legislation.²⁵

These developments have prompted fears of increased stigmatisation and pressure on CSOs that rely on foreign grants, including through the public disclosure of potentially sensitive information and the risk of selective, intrusive checks that could lead to undue interference in their activities.²⁶ These fears are reinforced by previous cases in which CSOs were subjected to harassment related to reporting on foreign funding. In the lead-up to the 2021 parliamentary elections, over a dozen organisations were targeted by tax authorities and threatened with heavy fines and suspension of their activities over alleged minor technical reporting violations.²⁷ Following domestic and international protests, the charges were eventually dropped, but these cases illustrate how foreign funding reporting requirements may be used as a pretext to pressure CSOs.

LGBTIQ+ groups and activists at particular risk

Policymakers have singled out foreign-funded feminist and LGBTIQ+ groups for particularly harsh criticism, accusing them of undermining national values and promoting “immoral behaviour.”²⁸ These groups are also facing increasing harassment, a trend likely to be reinforced by the recent adoption of legislation banning so-called LGBTIQ+ “propaganda” (see more under Freedom of Expression).

In several recent cases, anti-LGBTIQ+ activists have attacked gatherings of LGBTIQ+ activists with impunity, as police have failed to provide adequate protection, targeting victims rather than the attackers.²⁹ This is one example:

On 22 November 2025, a group of women associated with the Parents Union — known for its anti-LGBTIQ+ campaigns — burst into a café in Astana where LGBTIQ+ activists were having lunch, began filming them without permission, shouted insults at them – including by accusing

them of spreading “propaganda” – and attempted to prevent them from leaving.³⁰ Police arrived at the scene and detained **Temirlan Baymash**, co-founder of **Queer.kz**, for allegedly using obscene language in public. Later the same day, **Zhanar Sekerbaeva**, co-founder of **Feminita**, who had also been in the café, was detained without explanation in a food store.³¹ Both activists were released without charge after several hours. However, in February 2026, Sekerbaeva was charged with the criminal offense of “assault” based on a complaint filed by one of the intruders (see more under Persecution of Activists, Journalists and Bloggers).³² The day before the incident in the café, the same woman disrupted a roundtable on the situation of the LGBTIQ+ community in Kazakhstan, interrupting speakers and verbally abusing activists. Also on that occasion, police failed to act against the intruder and instead detained activist **Ardzh Tursynkan**, who was held overnight and later fined for allegedly swearing at the woman.³³

The failure of LGBTIQ+ organisations to obtain state registration further increases their vulnerability. For example, since 2017, Feminita has repeatedly been denied registration with the Ministry of Justice on spurious grounds.

Harassment of opposition movements

Despite the political modernisation drive initiated by the authorities, political pluralism continues to be undermined by the failure to grant registration to political opposition groups.

The opposition party **Alga Kazakhstan!** (“Forward Kazakhstan!”) founded in spring 2022 has repeatedly had its application for registration returned because of alleged problems with the list of supporters provided. Its application has been returned more than 25 times on these grounds.³⁴ At the same, members of Alga Kazakhstan! have faced ongoing intimidation and harassment, and its leader **Marat Zhylanbaev** remains imprisoned on unsubstantiated charges (see Persecution of Activists, Journalists and Bloggers).

The **Atajurt organisation**, which defends the rights of ethnic Kazakhs living in China’s Xinjiang region, has also been unsuccessful in registering as a political party and its members have been subjected to intimidation and harassment. In November 2025, 19 activists from the movement were detained and criminally charged following a peaceful protest against Chinese policies and influence (see Persecution of Activists, Journalists and Bloggers).

Other movements have also faced difficulties obtaining registration. For example, the **YNTYMAQ** initiative group – whose political agenda and priorities are not clear from publicly available information – has reported being repeatedly denied registration as a political party on technical grounds. It has also sought registration as a public association but was also unsuccessful in this respect. Following more than 20 rejections, the group concluded that the registration procedure has become “an insurmountable administrative barrier.”³⁵

Authorities have also continued to target supporters and alleged supporters of the banned opposition movements **Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan** (DVK) and **Koshe Partiyasy** (“Street

Party”), prosecuting peaceful activities as “extremism.”³⁶ Due to the longstanding campaign against those accused of involvement in these movements, engagement with them has significantly decreased. The European Parliament has condemned the abuse of anti-extremism legislation against supporters of the two opposition movements.³⁷

Recommendations

The Kazakhstani authorities should:

- Refrain from undue control, discrimination and stigmatisation of CSOs – including foreign-funded ones – and ensure that any oversight of such organisations is implemented in accordance with Kazakhstan’s international obligations.
- Abolish the public list of foreign-funded entities as well as the separate reporting scheme for such groups and ensure that foreign-funded organisations are not subjected to checks and inspections by tax authorities without compelling reasons.
- Ensure that the views of independent CSOs are duly taken into account in the drafting of new NGO legislation and that this legislation fully aligns with international human rights standards.
- Ensure that LGBTIQ+ groups can exercise their freedom of association unhindered, investigate any incidents of harassment targeting them and their members, and hold those responsible to account.
- Allow opposition parties to register and carry out their activities without undue obstruction and hindrance and stop intimidating and harassing opposition activists for their peaceful engagement.

Freedom of Expression

Attacks on media and journalists

Independent media and journalists have come under growing attack in Kazakhstan.

In December 2025, police raided the offices of the independent **Orda.kz** outlet, detained its staff and placed its editor-in-chief **Gulnara Bazhkenova** under house arrest pending investigation on charges of knowingly spreading “false” information. Media and human rights groups denounced this development – which followed months of harassment against Orda.kz – as retaliation for the outlet’s independent investigative reporting on corruption and other issues.³⁸

The director and editor-in-chief of the **KazTAG** news agency - **Aset Mataev** and **Amir Kassenov** - have similarly faced charges of spreading “false” information over its investigative reporting on alleged fraud in a case reportedly characterised by procedural violations. This investigation has further reinforced concerns about the misuse of the Criminal Code provision on “false” information to restrict legitimate reporting and free expression.³⁹ (See more about the cases

against the Orda.kz and KazTAG journalists under Persecution of Activists, Journalists and Bloggers).

In another worrying development, the independent **Respublika.kz.news** site was blocked across Kazakhstan in November 2025, officially based on a court decision dating from over a decade ago, but in practice appearing to have been triggered by its recent coverage.⁴⁰

In February 2026, targeted attacks against several news sites were reported, resulting in difficulties in accessing the sites.⁴¹ The KazTAG site became inaccessible shortly after it published an interview with an expert critical of the ongoing constitutional reform.⁴² Several bloggers and activists also reportedly faced intimidation and harassment by law enforcement authorities following posts criticising the reform.⁴³ At least the newspaper “**Uralskaya Nedelya**”, a journalist, and an activist have been fined for posting informal surveys about the referendum on their social media accounts, allegedly in violation of rules governing surveys related to referendums.⁴⁴

A growing number of online attacks against individual journalists and activists have also been reported, including the suspension of social media accounts following posts on politically sensitive issues. These incidents illustrate the risk of abuse of content-complaint mechanisms of social media platforms to suppress freedom of expression.⁴⁵

In a related development, draft legislation currently under consideration by the government could introduce new requirements for social media platforms to open representative offices in Kazakhstan and cooperate more closely with authorities, including by deleting content deemed unlawful within 24 hours. Failure to comply could result in restrictions on the platforms’ operations in the country.⁴⁶ This raises concerns that legitimate expression could be removed without proper judicial oversight.

Restrictive media legislation and accreditation rules

The new media law, which entered into force in Kazakhstan in August 2024,⁴⁷ has drawn criticism from both representatives of the media community and international experts.⁴⁸ It is of particular concern that the law introduced mandatory registration for both online and offline media, while providing for vague grounds for suspending or terminating media operations, creating the risk of abusive implementation. However, to date, no media outlet is known to have been denied registration or to have had their operations suspended or terminated under the law.

New accreditation rules introduced in 2024 grant the authorities broad powers to deny or revoke accreditation for foreign media and journalists.⁴⁹ In an example of the misuse of accreditation rules, the Foreign Ministry refused to renew the accreditation of 16 journalists from the Kazakh service of **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty** (RFE/RL) in summer 2025. Authorities claimed they had violated the law by working without valid accreditation, but RFE/RL

stressed the Ministry failed to process their applications within the required two-month period, causing their permits to lapse before a decision was made.⁵⁰ The service filed complaints to court about the rejections of accreditation to its journalists; however, these complaints were rejected⁵¹, with appeal proceedings still under way at the time of writing. Under legal amendments adopted in late 2025, foreign media and journalists working without accreditation may now face fines.⁵²

Ban on so-called LGBTIQ+ propaganda

In an alarming development, legislation banning so-called LGBTIQ+ “propaganda” was adopted by Parliament through an accelerated, non-transparent process and signed by the president in December 2025, despite widespread criticism.

Mirroring similar legislation in Russia, it prohibits the “propaganda of non-traditional sexual orientation,” defined as the dissemination of information about “non-traditional sexual orientation” or “adherence” to it through media, online platforms, or other public means for the purpose of “forming a positive public opinion.”⁵³ This overly broad definition means that the publication of virtually any information relating to LGBTIQ+ issues, as well as public expressions of support for people identifying as LGBTIQ+ could be deemed prohibited propaganda. Violations may result in sanctions, including the blocking of online resources, restrictions on the operations of media outlets, and fines or detention of up to 10 days.⁵⁴

The legislation prompted strong criticism from human rights organisations⁵⁵, the diplomatic community⁵⁶ and international experts⁵⁷, who warned that it violates Kazakhstan’s international human rights obligations, entrenches stigma and discrimination, enhances the vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people, and creates a high risk of arbitrary enforcement. Critics also objected to the apparent equation of so-called non-traditional sexual orientation with paedophilia in the new law and challenged the official claims that the ban is aimed at safeguarding children. UN human rights mechanisms stressed that the protection of children “is not advanced by censorship, exclusion and vilifying minorities, but by equitable and inclusive education, access to information, measures that ensure equality and non-discrimination, and the affirmation of all human rights of all persons.”⁵⁸

The new legislation follows earlier initiatives to ban so-called LGBTIQ+ propaganda in Kazakhstan. Following a public petition to ban such propaganda,⁵⁹ the government commissioned an expert study on its alleged impact on children in 2024.⁶⁰ According to media reports, the resulting study concluded that sexual orientation “cannot be arbitrarily influenced from the outside by propaganda” and that the LGBTIQ+ movement has a positive effect on young people’s sexual identity, including by providing support and reducing isolation.⁶¹ These findings were reportedly removed from the Ministry of Health’s website following public remarks by the president in March 2025, portraying LGBTIQ+ rights as a tool for foreign interference in Kazakhstan.⁶²

The new legislation is due to enter into force 60 days after its official publication, i.e. in March 2026. Implementing rules elaborated by the government will be crucial for its application in practice. Even before the legislation entered into force, LGBTIQ+ activists faced renewed pressure, with several anti-LGBTIQ+ attacks reported (see more under Freedom of Association).

Surveillance of online platforms and countering “anti-social behaviour”

Persistent concerns about state monitoring of media and social media platforms targeting the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression were reinforced by the publication in June 2025 of a procurement announcement by the Astana Communications Service. The service announced a contract of approximately €27,000 to monitor more than 55,000 media and social media sources, with the contractor being expected to flag “aggressive” and “strongly aggressive” content – particularly criticism of the government – and to compile monthly reports identifying specific authors, accounts, and platforms.⁶³

Online monitoring to identify critical content has been publicly endorsed at the highest political level. In September 2025, President Tokayev publicly expressed indignation over social media users allegedly spreading “disinformation” and “provocative” or “destructive” content, stating that state agencies were working to identify such users and determine where they live.⁶⁴

New legislation on preventing offenses, which was adopted by Parliament and subsequently signed by the president in December 2025, expanded the powers of so-called community assistants in crime prevention.⁶⁵ It allows them to report suspected offences and detain individuals without clear limits, training requirements, or accountability mechanisms, while also mandating them to address vaguely defined “anti-social behaviour.” Human rights defenders have warned that these provisions could enable arbitrary targeting, including for actions such as expressing support for LGBTIQ+ rights, and facilitate the emergence of a para-policing system that legitimises surveillance, Soviet-style denunciations, and abuse.⁶⁶

Recommendations

The Kazakhstani authorities should:

- End harassment and intimidation of independent media and journalists – including by dropping unfounded criminal cases – and allow them to carry out their work without undue interference or fear of reprisals.
- Refrain from using the fight against disinformation as a pretext to stifle legitimate, critical reporting and expression.
- Conduct prompt and transparent investigations into attacks or interference affecting media platforms and online access and ensure that online resources are not arbitrarily blocked due to their coverage of sensitive issues.

- Ensure that the implementation of the new media law does not result in violations of the freedoms of media and expression, and that its provisions are brought in line with international standards.
- Ensure that requests for accreditation filed by foreign journalists are promptly considered and that such requests are not rejected on arbitrary grounds.
- Refrain from suppressing open debate and exchange on issues of public interest, such as the ongoing constitutional reform.
- Withdraw the legislation banning so-called LGBTIQ+ propaganda due to its inherently flawed and discriminatory nature and its inconsistency with international human rights standards.
- Ensure that the engagement of “community assistants” in crime prevention does not result in arbitrary and discriminatory targeting of LGBTIQ+ representatives or other individuals.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Lack of accountability for violations perpetrated during January 2022 events

There are persistent concerns about the widespread lack of accountability for excessive force, torture, and other serious violations committed during the “Bloody January” events in 2022, when authorities harshly suppressed mass protests for social and political change and evolving unrest.⁶⁷

According to information provided by the authorities for the UN Human Rights Committee’s review of Kazakhstan’s compliance with the ICCPR in June 2025, 566 complaints about unlawful conduct were received from citizens following the January 2022 events, and 334 investigations were opened into such complaints. The official state report, dated April 2024, further stated that 31 police and security officers had been convicted for violations, with additional cases pending court review.⁶⁸ Newer comprehensive statistics are not available. However, while some additional convictions are known to have been handed down, the number of convictions remains low both in relation to the number of complaints filed and the number of investigations opened.

Many investigations were prematurely closed due to an alleged lack of evidence, while cases reaching court have often been marred by fair trial concerns, lenient penalties, and inadequate compensation for victims.⁶⁹ For example, in January 2025, six police officers convicted of brutally torturing several dozen people in a detention centre in Almaty region received mere three-year prison sentences, and victims’ requests for compensation were only partially granted. Lawyers also raised concerns that the trial began before all the facts had been clarified and all perpetrators had been identified. The verdict was later upheld on appeal without changes.⁷⁰

In a report on its monitoring of more than 400 court proceedings related to the January 2022 events, published in May 2025,⁷¹ the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

(ODIHR) concluded that investigations into alleged violations of the right to life and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment during the January 2022 events were, overall, inadequate. It also highlighted the “disparity between the high number of civilian deaths, widespread allegations of torture and ill-treatment and the low number of prosecutions for these killings,” documented various violations of international fair trial standards in court proceedings, and regretted “the lack of a comprehensive and transparent mechanism for providing adequate redress” to victims. It issued detailed recommendations to the authorities for measures to address identified shortcomings.

After reviewing Kazakhstan’s implementation of the ICCPR in June 2025, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed deep regret over reports of deaths of peaceful protesters during the January 2022 events resulting from excessive and lethal use of force by law enforcement officials, the closure of many torture investigations on the grounds that allegations were unsubstantiated, and reported due process violations following the mass detention of protesters. The Committee called for prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all alleged violations, appropriate punishment of perpetrators, and full reparation for victims.⁷²

Ongoing violations of assembly rights

When reviewing Kazakhstan’s compliance with the ICCPR in June 2025, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern that the 2020 law on assemblies restricts assemblies to specific locations, fails to protect spontaneous demonstrations, and provides for a notification-based procedure that is used in practice to selectively deny permissions.⁷³

In a welcome decision issued in January 2025, the Constitutional Court ruled that authorities must not automatically reject requests to hold peaceful assemblies on the grounds that the proposed venue is occupied, but that they must suggest an alternative time or venue of equivalent suitability.⁷⁴

However, despite this ruling, authorities have continued to reject requests to hold peaceful protests on dubious grounds, for example, claiming that the organisers have provided incorrect or incomplete information about the planned assembly and its participants. At the same time, participants in occasional peaceful protests held without pre-approval have continued to face detention and penalties, including fines and short-term administrative arrest. The practice of “preventive” detentions of activists ahead of state holidays – when protests are feared – has also persisted.

This ongoing clampdown has further restricted the already limited space for exercising the right to peaceful assembly in the country, resulting in a significant decrease in the number of peaceful protests held.

Below a few examples of violations of the rights of protesters in recent months are described.⁷⁵

The following example shows how requests to hold peaceful protests continue to be arbitrarily rejected, while also illustrating how broadly authorities interpret the notion of “false” information:

- In November 2025, **Yevgeniy Xhabarov**, head of the Tauan public foundation, received 11 rejections to requests to hold peaceful rallies in Pavlodar to raise concerns about infrastructure projects, public services, housing costs, and other socio-economic issues. The first ten requests were rejected on the grounds that he had allegedly provided incomplete information, while the last one was declined because the submitted documents allegedly did not meet legal requirements. Local authorities also filed a complaint with the police, accusing him of spreading “false” information in violation of Article 456-2 of the Code of Administrative Offenses. The complaint concerned a social media post about the initial rejections in which he mistakenly stated that authorities had refused permission due to the proposed venue being occupied. He later noticed and corrected the mistake after consulting the relevant legal provisions cited in the responses he received. Nevertheless, on 1 December 2025, a local court fined him the equivalent of around EUR 100.⁷⁶

The following cases illustrate authorities’ lack of tolerance of even small-scale peaceful protests held without official sanction:

- On 3 December 2025, transgender activist **Yara Tychina** held an individual picket in Astana calling on the authorities to refrain from adopting draft legislation banning so-called LGBTIQ+ propaganda, which was under parliamentary consideration at the time. Shortly after she began her picket she was detained by police and taken to a local police station.⁷⁷ Later the same day she was released but in mid-January 2026, a local court fined her the equivalent of approximately €215 for allegedly violating rules governing the organisation of assemblies.⁷⁸
- In the summer of 2025, **Guldaria Sherizatkyzy** and her daughter, **Riza Alimnur**, were repeatedly detained, fined and warned by police for violating assembly rules when staging peaceful public actions in Almaty to draw attention to the case of their husband and father, Alimnur Turganbai.⁷⁹ Turganbai, an ethnic Kazakh who left China’s Xinjiang region for Kazakhstan in 2017 and subsequently obtained Kazakhstani citizenship, was detained in July 2025 while travelling to China for work as a truck driver. As the family received no information about the grounds for his detention or his legal status, they sought support from the Kazakhstani authorities. Later, in November 2025, Sherizatkyzy and 18 other activists from the Atajurt movement were detained while holding a peaceful protest near the border with China to demand Turganbai’s release and to express broader concerns about Chinese government policies. (See more in the chapter on Persecution of Activists, Journalists and Bloggers).

This case documents the targeting of individuals seeking to convey concerns to the president using an official petition procedure, as well as of a journalist conducting his professional activities:

- On 15 January 2026, three women gathered in front of the House of Ministries in Astana to draw attention to the cases of their children who had died under unclear circumstances and to demand fair investigations. They planned to submit a collective petition to the president at the House of Ministries, where such appeals are received. However, before they were able to do so, police intervened and detained them.⁸⁰ They were all subsequently fined approximately €200 for allegedly violating assembly rules. Journalist **Nurbol Kuralov** from Ulysmidia.kz, who was present to cover the protest, was also apprehended without explanation, taken to a local police station, and held there for about an hour before being released. He reported being pressured to write an explanatory note and questioned why he was present at the protest, who had invited him, and whether he had received payment. His phone was confiscated, and when it was returned, all photos and videos had been deleted.⁸¹

These are some examples of “preventive” detentions:

- Ahead of Republic Day, marked on 25 October 2025, exile-based government opponent Mukhtar Ablyazov called on his supporters to hold protests on this day against rising prices and taxes. To prevent protests, authorities detained dozens of activists across the country before the state holiday, issuing short-term arrests and fines for alleged violations, e.g. because of social media posts and reposts. In several cases, the detentions were reportedly carried out using force, with those targeted including people with disabilities and elderly people.⁸²
- Similarly, on the eve of the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Political Repressions and Famine on 31 May 2025, around a dozen activists across the country faced administrative penalties — either for alleged participation in previous unauthorised assemblies or on other spurious grounds. Combined with widespread rejections of requests to hold assemblies, these penalties were clearly aimed at preventing protests on this day.⁸³
- On 17 August 2025, several activists in different regions of Kazakhstan were detained while participating in, or on their way to take part in, running events organised in support of imprisoned Alga! opposition party leader Murat Zhylanbaev (see more on his case under Persecution of Activists, Bloggers and Journalists). The events were held to mark Zhylanbaev’s birthday.⁸⁴ Earlier, on 8 August, civic activist Bibigul Imangalieva was sentenced to 10 days’ detention for allegedly violating rules on holding assemblies in connection with a video clip she recorded in April in support of Zhylanbaev. The penalty was imposed shortly after she spoke at a press conference organised to draw attention to his deteriorating health in prison.⁸⁵

Recommendations

The Kazakhstani authorities should:

- In line with the recommendations by the OSCE ODIHR and the UN Human Rights Committee, ensure that all allegations of excessive use of force, torture and other violations related to the January 2022 events are investigated in an impartial, transparent, and effective manner (including by re-opening investigations prematurely closed) and that those responsible are given appropriate penalties and victims granted adequate compensation.
- Publish comprehensive, up-to-date statistics on criminal cases opened based on allegations of human rights violations during the January 2022 events, including the number of cases submitted to courts, as well as the number of law enforcement and security officials convicted, and the sentences imposed (with account of appeal proceedings).
- Revise the law on organising and conducting peaceful assemblies, in accordance with the advice of national and international experts, to bring it into compliance with international standards, including by providing for a simple notification procedure for assemblies, clearly defining what constitutes an assembly under the law, and protecting the right to hold spontaneous protests.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the Constitutional Court ruling of 20 January 2025 and refrain from automatically denying requests to hold protests.
- Allow peaceful protests to take place without hindrance, and refrain from detaining and penalising citizens for organising, calling for or participating in peaceful assemblies, even if held without pre-approval by authorities.
- Put an end to the practice of “preventive” detentions of activists ahead of planned or expected peaceful protests.
- Protect the rights of human rights defenders and journalists who monitor and cover protests.

Persecution of Activists, Journalists, and Bloggers: Cases of Concern

Civil society activists, opposition supporters, human rights defenders, journalists, and bloggers who are critical of the authorities face ongoing intimidation and harassment, ranging from online threats to arrest and prosecution on politically motivated charges. Those prosecuted and convicted often face broadly worded charges such as spreading “false” information, “inciting” discord, and participation in “extremist” activities.

The use of criminal prosecution as a tool of retaliation has recently increased, and more than two dozen people are currently behind bars on charges considered politically motivated by Kazakhstani human rights defenders.

Below we describe a few individual cases, which are of particular concern to us and illustrate the broader pattern of persecution. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.⁸⁶

Journalists targeted over investigative reporting, lawyer stripped of license

Orda.kz's editor-in-chief, **Gulnara Bazhkenova**, was detained in Almaty on 1 December 2025 following police searches of her home and the outlet's premises, which were reportedly characterised by serious procedural violations such as denial of access to legal assistance, refusal to present search warrants and the confiscation of equipment and documents without explanation. Bazhenova was subsequently placed under house arrest on charges of repeated and deliberate distribution of "false" information under Article 274 of the Criminal Code.⁸⁷ As of February 2026, the investigation was ongoing.

Both Kazakhstani media groups⁸⁸ and international human rights organisations⁸⁹ have raised alarm over the case against Bazhenova, which is widely viewed as retaliation for Orda's high-profile investigative reporting on corruption and other issues, as well as a stark example of the misuse of the vaguely worded Criminal Code provision on "false" information to stifle freedom of expression. These concerns are further reinforced by the fact that the December events followed months of harassment against Bazhkenova and the outlet, including cyberattacks, threats, and disinformation campaigns.⁹⁰

In a further worrying development, in mid-January 2026 a local court in Almaty ruled in favour of a request by the Ministry of Justice to strip lawyer **Murat Adam** of his licence to practise law, citing alleged "multiple violations" committed during his defence of Orda chief editor Gulnara Bazhkenova.⁹¹ Specifically, he was accused of disseminating "incorrect" information on social media, where he reported procedural violations in the case and criticised the Criminal Code provision under which Bazhkenova is charged. This move drew strong criticism from the legal community, as it was seen as aimed at penalising Adam for his legitimate representation of his client, in violation of international standards protecting the independence of the legal profession.⁹² Adam appealed the decision, and appeal proceedings are pending at the time of writing.

The leadership of KazTAG, a well-known news agency that covers politically sensitive issues, has also faced charges of knowingly disseminating "false" information (under Article 274 of the Criminal Code). A criminal case was opened against its general director, **Aset Mataev**, and editor-in-chief, **Amir Kassenov**, following a complaint by Freedom Finance – a company managed by one of the country's most influential business figures, Russia-born Timur Turlov. The case relates to KazTAG publications alleging that Freedom Finance was involved in fraudulent schemes, including potential circumvention of international sanctions against Russia.⁹³

According to KazTAG, it was not properly informed about the opening of the criminal case or the investigative actions taken and only learned of them through media reports in November 2025, in violation of due process standards.⁹⁴ Mataev and Kassenov were subsequently questioned by police, and, following brief detention, Kassenov was placed under house arrest on 24 December 2025.⁹⁵ A few days later, police searched his home, reportedly denying lawyers access, as well as the premises of the news agency.⁹⁶ At the time of writing, the investigation continued.

Among others, the Adil Soz Foundation expressed serious concerns over the opening of the criminal case against KazTAG and the reported procedural violations, calling on the authorities to strictly comply with criminal procedure legislation, ensure transparency of the investigation, and guarantee the journalists' professional rights.⁹⁷

Freedom Finance has separately filed a civil lawsuit against KazTAG, alleging that the agency's reporting damaged its business reputation. This lawsuit is currently under consideration, with a court ruling in favour of the claimant's request to hold the trial behind closed doors on 16 February 2026.⁹⁸ In early February, KazTAG reported that a local court had rejected another defamation lawsuit filed against it by a former top manager from Freedom Finance.⁹⁹

Concerns for the well-being of imprisoned activists

The leader of the unregistered party Alga Kazakhstan!, **Marat Zhylanbaev** continues to serve a seven-year prison sentence on extremism-related charges, issued in 2023 in retaliation for his peaceful opposition activities.¹⁰⁰ In an opinion made public in July 2025, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that his deprivation of liberty violated Kazakhstan's international obligations and called for his release,¹⁰¹ echoing earlier calls by human rights organisations.

Zhylanbaev has reportedly been held in deplorable and unsanitary conditions in the prison in Stepnogorsk where he is serving his sentence and has been subjected to ongoing humiliation and pressure¹⁰², while his contacts with his lawyers and family have been restricted on various pretexts.¹⁰³ He has repeatedly held extended hunger strikes to protest inhuman and degrading treatment, compounding concerns about his health and well-being. In late February 2026, Zhylanbaev's family warned that he was in a seriously weakened condition after more than 40 days of hunger strike. They also reported that he had been transferred to stricter detention conditions – characterised by further restrictions on his contacts with the outside world – following 14 days in a punishment cell for alleged violations of prison rules.¹⁰⁴ His family and human rights defenders questioned the findings of a public monitoring group, which concluded that his conditions were "satisfactory" and that he had no complaints about his treatment after visiting him in detention.¹⁰⁵ Previously the Ombudsperson has also dismissed reports about Zhylanbaev's deteriorating health¹⁰⁶, while those raising concerns about his well-being have faced intimidation (see the case of Bakhytzhan Toregozhina below).

Journalist and activist **Duman Mukhamedkarim** is likewise serving a seven-year prison sentence issued on spurious extremism-related charges following a closed trial in 2024.¹⁰⁷ Mukhamedkarim reported being subjected to ill-treatment in pre-trial detention, with an investigation opened into these allegations failing to produce any concrete results. In violation of the legal requirement that prisoners serve their sentences in their home regions, he is held in a facility in Kyzylorda region, about 1,000 kilometres from his home in Almaty region. The activist has reportedly held hunger strikes to protest the failure of prison authorities to adequately address his complaints and requests for assistance, including those regarding his health and

threats received.¹⁰⁸ Human rights defenders have recognised him as a political prisoner and called for his release.¹⁰⁹

Journalist and activist **Aigerim Tleuzhan** was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for her alleged involvement in the seizure of Almaty airport during the January 2022 events following a flawed and politically motivated trial.¹¹⁰ She has also experienced serious health problems in prison. In October 2025, her lawyer reported that Tleuzhan's health had deteriorated following recent surgery, noting significant weight loss, fatigue, and repeated fainting. According to the lawyer, she did not receive adequate medical assistance in prison.¹¹¹ Only a month later, Tleuzhan was temporarily hospitalised for comprehensive medical examinations.¹¹² The prison in the Zhaugashty settlement where she is held is reportedly characterised by harsh conditions, including overcrowded barracks, poor ventilation, extreme temperatures, and constant surveillance.¹¹³

Activists convicted after protesting nuclear power plant

Activists **Aidar Mubarakov, Nurlan Zhaulybaev, Fazylzhan Sydykov, Nurlan Temirgaliev, and Zhanat Kazakhbai** were all arrested in September 2024 after peacefully opposing the construction of a nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan.¹¹⁴ They were charged with preparing mass riots (Article 272, Part 1 of the Criminal Code) based on recorded conversations in which they discussed plans to hold a peaceful protest on the issue. Human rights defenders deemed the charges politically motivated.¹¹⁵ On 26 August 2025, a local court in Almaty sentenced the activists to four years of restricted freedom – a non-custodial sentence – and banned them from engaging in public or political activities for five years.¹¹⁶ As a result, they were released after spending more than ten months in pre-trial detention. In November 2025, an appeals court reduced their sentences to 2.5 years of restricted freedom, although upholding the ban on public engagement.¹¹⁷

While the outcome of the trial was less severe than feared, as prosecutors had sought five-year prison terms, the convictions nevertheless caused alarm. In a joint communication to the government, six UN human rights mandate holders expressed serious concern over the criminal prosecution and sentencing of the five activists, noting that most hearings reportedly were conducted in a rushed manner, leaving the defendants little opportunity to present their views. The experts also raised concerns that detention conditions had not been adapted to the needs of three activists with chronic medical conditions and reduced mobility.¹¹⁸

Activists protesting China's repressive policies charged with "inciting discord"

On 13 November 2025, police detained 19 activists affiliated with the Atajurt movement when they staged a peaceful protest near the Kazakhstan–China border in Almaty region to highlight the persecution of ethnic Kazakhs in China's Xinjiang region, demand the release of a co-activist who was detained while travelling to China in the summer of 2025, and express concern about China's growing political and economic influence in Kazakhstan. During the protest, activists

burned three small Chinese flags and a portrait of the Chinese president and shouted slogans such as “Down with China!”, “Down with the Communist Party!”, and “Down with Xi Jinping!”. Video recordings of the protest were shared on social media. However, the protest remained peaceful throughout and did not include any calls for violence, hostility, or discrimination.¹¹⁹

After being apprehended by police, some of the activists were sentenced to short-term detention, while others were fined for “petty hooliganism” – an administrative offence. However, following the issuance of a diplomatic note by the Chinese General Consulate in Almaty, requesting “appropriate measures” to address the protest, the authorities also initiated more serious charges against the activists on “inciting” national discord (Article 174(2) of the Criminal Code). Thirteen activists – **Bekzat Maxutkhan, Baqytur Nurmuqan, Batylbek Baigazy, Bedelkhan Qabileshim, Marghulan Nurdangazy, Beisenali Aqzhigit, Nurgeldi Nursapa, Erkinbek Nuraqyn, Ergali Nurlybayev, Erbol Nurlybayev, Tursynbek Qabi, Qanat Turdybai and Quandyk Qozhanov** – were remanded to custody, while six others – **Nazigul Maksutkhan, Gulnar Shaimurat, Guldariya Sherizat, Baqytzhan Shugyl, Asylkhan Kolkhaev and Ayan Kalymbet** – were ordered to house arrest.

The trial in the case started behind closed doors in the city of Taldykorgan – several hours from the Almaty region where the protest took place – in late January 2026 and was ongoing at the time of writing. If found guilty, the activists could face up to 10 years in prison.

IPHR and KIBHR expressed serious concerns about the case and called for the dismissal of the charges and the release of activists, stressing that it forms part of a broader pattern of pressure against the Atajurt movement due to its advocacy on behalf of victims of China’s repression of ethnic minorities. They also noted that although the burning of Chinese flags and the Chinese president’s portrait may be regarded as offensive, the imposition of criminal sanctions for this expressive conduct – which was aimed at amplifying the activists’ message and was driven by their indignation with Chinese policies directly affecting them and their relatives – would be manifestly disproportionate and unjustified under international human rights law.¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch¹²¹ and Amnesty International¹²² similarly called for dropping the charges against the activists, and representatives of the international community have been following the case.¹²³

There are heightened concerns about the impact of the legal proceedings and the related emotional stress on the well-being of one of the activists – Nazigul Maksutkhan – who was at an advanced stage of pregnancy when placed under house arrest and who gave birth to a child in late February 2026. Some of the defendants held in pre-trial detention have also reportedly experienced deteriorating health problems in custody.

In a related negative development, co-activists expressing support for the activists facing criminal charges have reportedly been subjected to intimidation, including by being pressured not to show up at the court where the trial is held or to delete social media posts in their support.¹²⁴

Satirical blogger convicted for sharing controversial but widely available song

Following his arrest in January 2025, blogger **Temirlan Yensebek** was convicted of “inciting” inter-ethnic discord in April 2025. He was sentenced to five years of restricted freedom – a non-custodial sentence – and banned from posting on social media and participating in public activities for the same period because of a post in which he shared a controversial song containing offensive lyrics about Russians.¹²⁵ Yensebek’s satirical post was a reaction to claims made by a Russian pro-government media personality that the Russian language is being pushed out in Kazakhstan.¹²⁶

IPHR, KIBHR and other human rights organisations believe the song was used as a pretext to punish Yensebek for his posts critical of Kazakhstani and Russian public figures, stressing that he did not write the song and that it has been widely shared on social media. In addition, his arrest came only a year after his post featuring the song.¹²⁷

Following his conviction, Yensebek left Qaznews24, the satirical Instagram channel he had been running. In spite of this, he was again summoned for questioning about materials posted on the channel in December 2025, as part of a criminal investigation on spreading “false” information opened based on a complaint filed by an MP.¹²⁸ At the time of writing, no further information about the investigation was available.

LGBTIQ+ activist criminally charged based on complaint from attacker

Zhanar Sekerbaeva, co-founder of the feminist and LGBTIQ+ organisation Feminita, is facing charges of “assault” under Article 109-1 of the Criminal Code, based on a complaint filed by well-known anti-LGBTIQ+ activist Ziyar Zhumanova.

Zhumanova has accused Sekerbaeva of assaulting her during an incident in Astana on 22 November 2025, when the former and her co-activists interrupted a private gathering of LGBTIQ+ activists at a café, verbally harassed participants and attempted to prevent them from leaving. Following that incident, Sekerbaeva was briefly detained (see more under Freedom of Association).

While Sekerbaeva was initially summoned for questioning as a witness in the case in January 2026, she learned the following month that her status had been changed to that of a suspect. If found guilty, she could face a fine, public works, or up to 25 days’ administrative arrest.

She considers the charges to be politically motivated retaliation for her long-standing human rights work and LGBTIQ+ advocacy, noting that the police have failed to act on her complaints regarding Zhumanova’s harassment.¹²⁹

New “extremist” case against opposition activist

New cases of prosecutions of opposition activists have also been documented, with charges initiated in apparent retaliation for the activists’ peaceful engagement and criticism of authorities. This is one case of concern:

On 18 November 2025, police detained **Amangeldy Jahin**, a leading figure of the Alga Kazakhstan! opposition party, following a search of his home in Astana. He is facing charges of involvement in a banned extremist organisation and financing extremist activities under Articles 405 and 258 of the Criminal Code — the same charges for which the party’s leader, Marat Zhylanbaev, is serving a seven-year prison sentence (see more on his case above).¹³⁰

As part of the investigation, a psychological and philological expert study reportedly concluded that the positions taken by the Alga Kazakhstan! party on issues such as anti-corruption efforts and social policy are identical to those of the DVK and Koshe Partyasy opposition movements, both of which have been banned by a court as “extremist organisations” (see more under Freedom of Association). Jahin is also accused of transferring small sums of money to Zhylanbaev prior to his conviction on “extremist” charges as well as to a co-activist who allegedly subsequently transferred the funds to the DVK – but who has not faced any charges in this context.¹³¹

As of early 2026, Jahin remained in pre-trial detention pending further investigation. His case fits into a broader pattern of persecution of the Alga Kazakhstan! party and its activists, who have faced ongoing harassment and intimidation.

Criminal investigation against priest opposing Ukraine war

In the early morning of February 2026, police detained Orthodox priest **Yakov Vorontsov** following a search of his home, during which a prohibited powdery substance was allegedly found. He was subsequently sentenced to 10 days’ administrative arrest on charges of non-medical drug use (under Article 440-1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses).¹³² When this sentence expired, he was not released but remained in detention on criminal charges of allegedly unlawfully possessing drugs and operating a drug den (under Articles 296 and 302 of the Criminal Code). At the time of writing, the court had yet to decide on further pre-trial preventive measures.¹³³

In a letter from detention published by his lawyer, Vorontsov denied the accusations and described the criminal case as fabricated. He stated that the substance allegedly discovered in his home did not belong to him and that he believed it had been planted. He also insisted that the only gatherings held in his home were meetings of believers for prayer and discussion.¹³⁴

Vorontsov has publicly opposed Russia’s war against Ukraine, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church’s portrayal of the conflict as a “holy” war. As a result of these positions, he was removed

from the clergy in 2023. He has since sought to establish a new, independent Orthodox community in Kazakhstan. His detention occurred shortly after he announced that he had filed a lawsuit against the Department of Justice over its refusal to register the community.¹³⁵ These circumstances suggest that the case against him is retaliatory in nature – as his supporters believe.¹³⁶ That impression is reinforced by the fact that he previously faced a criminal investigation for allegedly inciting discord (Article 174 of the Criminal Code) in a social media post sharply critical of the Russian Orthodox Church’s teaching on the war against Ukraine. That investigation was eventually closed.¹³⁷

Use of questioning as a tool of intimidation

In a recurring practice, activists, journalists and bloggers have been summoned for questioning in criminal investigations, apparently for the purpose of intimidating them.

For example, Uralsk-based journalist **Lukpan Akhmedyarov** was detained for questioning as a witness in a criminal case on spreading “false” information in April 2025 after publishing a video report on Kazakh citizens allegedly forced by Russian authorities to enlist for the war against Ukraine. A woman who had sought the journalist’s help in publicising her brother’s case, after he ended up fighting in Ukraine, later told him that she had been pressured into filing a complaint against him.¹³⁸

Human rights defender **Bakhytzhana Toregozhina** was detained for questioning as a witness in a criminal investigation into involvement in a banned organisation in August 2025.¹³⁹ This followed her social media posts raising concerns about the health and well-being of imprisoned opposition leader Marat Zhylanbaev, stating, among other things, that he was faint, unable to walk and that his weight had dropped to 45 kilogrammes.¹⁴⁰ Two weeks earlier, she was fined approximately 125 EUR for allegedly spreading “false” information in posts about the activist.¹⁴¹

As mentioned above, blogger Temirlan Yensebek was recently summoned for questioning in a criminal investigation on disseminating “false” information, while LGBTIQ+ rights activist Zhanar Sekerbaeva saw her procedural status changed from witness to suspect in a criminal case on alleged “assault.”

Transnational repression

There has been no meaningful progress in ensuring accountability for the July 2024 killing of Kazakhstani opposition journalist **Aidos Sadykov** in Kyiv.¹⁴² Kazakhstani authorities have failed to cooperate constructively with the investigation by Ukrainian prosecutors, who have identified two Kazakhstani citizens as suspected perpetrators. Sadykov’s widow, **Natalia Sadykova** – also an opposition journalist who has continued to run the couple’s BASE YouTube channel – has repeatedly faced intimidation and harassment.¹⁴³ In November 2025, she reported being covertly watched and filmed near her Kyiv home by a man who, when confronted, denied knowing her and claimed to work at the Kazakhstani embassy.¹⁴⁴ Ukrainian police later reportedly identified him as a Kazakhstan National Security Committee officer operating under

diplomatic cover.¹⁴⁵ Sadykova stated that she considers the surveillance particularly threatening given the killing of her husband, and her lawyer warned that the monitoring of her movements could indicate preparations for an attack on her life.

Women's rights activist **Dinara Smailova**, who fled Kazakhstan in 2021, has been criminally charged in absentia for allegedly using money donated to her organisation, *Ne Molchi*, for personal needs, disseminating "false" information on social media, and violating privacy. Both human rights defenders and UN experts have expressed serious concern about the charges against her, deeming them retribution for her efforts to assist survivors of domestic and sexual violence and ensure accountability for perpetrators.¹⁴⁶ In April 2025, Smailova was briefly detained in Montenegro based on an extradition request by Kazakhstani authorities. However, in a welcome development, the country's Supreme Court subsequently rejected this request¹⁴⁷, and Smailova and her husband were granted international protection in Montenegro.¹⁴⁸ Despite this, concerns about her safety persist and are reinforced by her reports of suspicious surveillance.¹⁴⁹ Smailova's organisation has also reported serious difficulties collecting funds following the freezing of its accounts in connection with the investigation against the activist.¹⁵⁰

Recommendations

The Kazakhstani authorities should:

- Stop persecuting activists, journalists and bloggers – including those based abroad – in retaliation for their peaceful and legitimate exercise of fundamental freedoms; clear those prosecuted on such grounds of charges and immediately and unconditionally release them, if they are currently behind bars.
- Protect the health and well-being of activists in detention and ensure that they have access to appropriate medical assistance, their lawyers and families. Promptly, thoroughly, and impartially investigate any allegations of abusive treatment and hold the perpetrators accountable.
- Refrain from misusing questioning in criminal investigations to intimidate activists, journalists, or bloggers.
- Allow lawyers representing activists, journalists and bloggers to carry out their professional activities without reprisals.
- Cooperate constructively with Ukrainian authorities on investigating the killing of journalist Aidos Sadykov in Ukraine, as well as reported incidents of intimidation and harassment of his widow, Natalia Sadykova.
- In line with the recommendations received during the UN UPR and the UN Human Rights Committee review in 2025, repeal or revise the Criminal Code provisions on "inciting discord" (article 174), "knowingly spreading false information" (article 274), and involvement in "extremist" activities (article 405 and others) to bring them into line with international standards. Ensure that these provisions are not used to penalise activists for their peaceful exercise of fundamental freedoms.

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- ¹ See more in the following IPHR comment on the publication of the new scores: <https://iphronline.org/articles/civicus-monitor-the-silencing-of-critical-voices-deepens-in-central-asia/>
- ² Its concluding observations are available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CCPR%2FC%2FKAZ%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en
- ³ See the outcome report from the UPR: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/kz-index>
- ⁴ <https://timesca.com/tokayev-proposes-a-new-constitutional-architecture/>
- ⁵ A set of amendments to the current constitution were approved through a referendum held in June 2022. See more in the following article from the Diplomat: <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/whats-in-kazakhstans-constitutional-referendum/>
- ⁶ <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/o-sozdani-komissii-po-konstitucionnoy-reforme-konstitucionnoy-komissii-2104633>
- ⁷ <https://vlast.kz/novosti/68153-tekst-konstitucii-kazahstana-perepisut-bolee-cem-na-80.html>
- ⁸ <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa-skopje/press/news/details/1156921#:~:text=The%20Constitutional%20Court%20of%20the,by%20President%20Kassym%2DJo mart%20Tokayev.>
- ⁹ <https://kazpravda.kz/n/v-kazahstane-opublikovali-proekt-novoy-konstitucii/>
- ¹⁰ https://www.akorda.kz/ru/o-provedenii-15-marta-2026-goda-respublikanskogo-referenduma-111316?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email
- ¹¹ <https://havli.substack.com/p/central-asias-week-that-was-91>
- ¹² Out of 130 members of the commission, only 13 were representatives of public associations, with well-known independent human rights organisations left out. See: <https://youth.kz/article/reforma-konstitucii-kazahstana-i-prava-cheloveka-cte5gExgRHTkeRjxqBxC>
- ¹³ <https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/obshchestvenniki-obratilis-k-tokaevu-s-opasenyami-po-povodu-konstitucionnoy-reformy>
- ¹⁴ See more in KIBHR analysis of the draft constitution: <https://bureau.kz/analiz/sravnitelnyj-analiz-polozhenij-konstitucii-2/>
- ¹⁵ For more information, see Vlast article from 7 February 2026: <https://vlast.kz/politika/68283-nedela-v-kazahstane-obsuzdajte-konstituciu-no-molca.html>
- ¹⁶ See more in IPHR-KIBHR update for the CIVICUS Monitor from July 2025: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-renewed-attacks-on-foreign-funded-ngos-protest-restrictions-despite-protective-court-ruling-and-ongoing-prosecution-of-critics/>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.zakon.kz/obshestvo/6466831-vvesti-v-kazahstane-zakon-ob-inostrannykh-agentakh-predlozhili-deputaty.html>, https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/deputat-predlozila-prinyat-v-kazahstane-zakon-ob-inoagentah-562299/
- ¹⁸ <https://www.zakon.kz/pravo/6475296-sozdana-rabochaya-gruppa-po-sovershenstvovaniyu-zakonodatelstva-o-npo.html>
- ¹⁹ See more about such concerns in the following article: <https://orda.kz/inoagency-po-kazahstanski-i-sila-goskontrolja-chto-vlasti-gotovjat-v-novom-zakone-ob-npo-406049/>
- ²⁰ See for example statements made by MP Magerram Magerramov during a parliamentary discussion in December 2025: <https://vlast.kz/novosti/67553-uzestocit-otcetnost-dla-polucatelej-inostrannogo-finansirovania-trebuat-deputat-mazilisa.html>
- ²¹ Available at: <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V2500037375>
- ²² The list is available at: <https://kgd.gov.kz/ru/content/reestr-lic-poluchayushchih-dengi-i-ili-inoe-imushchestvo-ot-inostrannyh-gosudarstv>
- ²³ The joint statement is available at: <https://www.iphronline.org/kazakhstan-abolish-the-foreign-funding-register.html>
- ²⁴ Under Article 460-1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses.
- ²⁵ https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/rezdyi-proverki-2026-goda-nalogoviki-poluchat-novyie-588960/
- ²⁶ For more information, see IPHR-KIBHR update for the CIVICUS Monitor from January 2026: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-pressure-on-media-lgbtqi-propaganda-law-and-criminal-cases-against-activists/>
- ²⁷ See more in the following joint statements issued by IPHR and partners: <https://www.iphronline.org/kazakhstan-end-campaign-against-human-rights-ngos-joint-civil-society-appeal.html>; <https://www.iphronline.org/kazakhstan-tax-officials-should-end-harassment-withdraw-their-notice.html>
- ²⁸ <https://orda.kz/detej-uchat-byt-gomoseksualistami-i-lesbijankami-v-kazahstane-ozabotilis-lgbt-propagandoj-399948>, <https://orda.kz/feministki-lgbt-i-jemo-razlagajut-obschestvo-schitajut-v-mazhilise-399954/>
- ²⁹ For additional examples, see IPHR-KIBHR update for the CIVICUS Monitor from July 2025: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-renewed-attacks-on-foreign-funded-ngos-protest-restrictions-despite-protective-court-ruling-and-ongoing-prosecution-of-critics/>
- ³⁰ <https://www.instagram.com/p/DRWtxLCDXrM/>, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/kazakhstan-physical-attacks-and-judicial-harassment-of-lgbtqia-defenders-temirlan-baimash-ardzh-tursynkhan-and-zhanar-sekerbayeva>
- ³¹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/DRW34C9DWNE/>
- ³² www.azattyqasia.org/a/aktivistka-zhanar-sekerbaeva-zayavila-o-davlenii-i-popytke-zavesti-na-nee-ugolovnoe-delo/33661048.html

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- ³³ For more information, see IPHR-KIBHR update for the CIVICUS Monitor from January 2026: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-pressure-on-media-lgbtqi-propaganda-law-and-criminal-cases-against-activists/>
- ³⁴ See more in IPHR-KIBHR update from June 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-flood-coverage-restrictions-womens-rights-rally-ban-and-legal-cases-against-activists/>
- ³⁵ <https://vlast.kz/novosti/67955-partii-yntymaq-vtoroj-raz-otkazali-v-registracii.html>
- ³⁶ For recent examples, see IPHR-KIBHR updates for the CIVICUS Monitor from July 2025 and January 2026: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-renewed-attacks-on-foreign-funded-ngos-protest-restrictions-despite-protective-court-ruling-and-ongoing-prosecution-of-critics/>; <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-pressure-on-media-lgbtqi-propaganda-law-and-criminal-cases-against-activists/>
- ³⁷ See resolution on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan adopted in February 2021: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0056_EN.html
- ³⁸ See joint statement by nine human rights groups from December 2025: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-journalism-free-expression-in-further-peril/>
- ³⁹ See more in IPHR-KIBHR update for the CIVICUS Monitor from January 2026: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-pressure-on-media-lgbtqi-propaganda-law-and-criminal-cases-against-activists/>
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- ⁵³ The legislation adopted is available at: https://prg.kz/document/?doc_id=35257075&pos=132;255
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