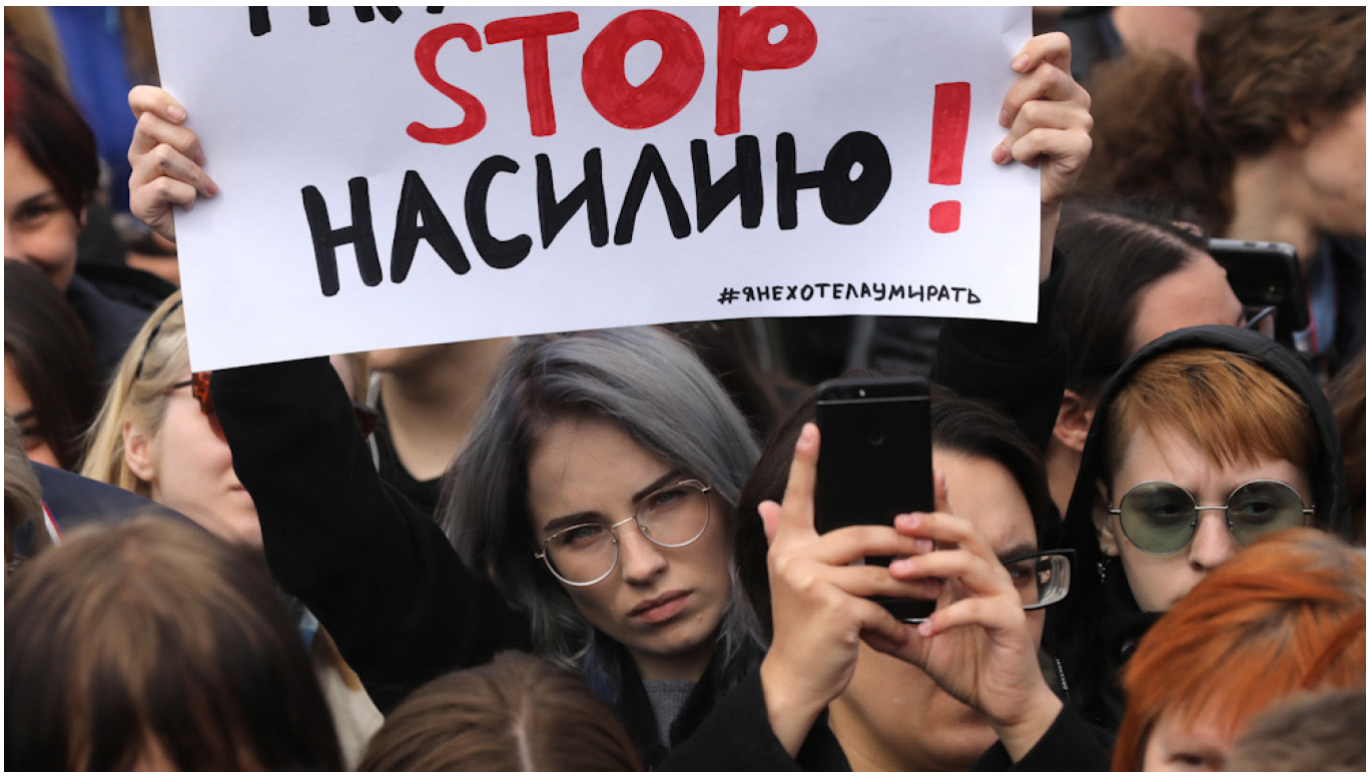
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Cuts Funding for Domestic Violence Initiatives – Reports

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Russia decriminalized first-time domestic abuse offenses in 2017, a move that activists and lawmakers have been working to overturn. **Sergei Konkov / TASS**

Russia has drastically cut funding for anti-domestic violence initiatives following years of dwindling financing in favor of non-government organizations that promote conservative values, the Open Media investigative outlet reported Thursday.

The outlet found that all but one out of an estimated dozen domestic violence crisis centers and legal aid organizations were rejected in 2021 as part of President Vladimir Putin's annual grants program.

Related article: When Your Home Isn't a Safe Space. Russian Women Fear Rise in Domestic Violence as Coronavirus Quarantine Starts.

This year's lone recipient was reportedly awarded 1.4 million rubles ($19,000) to temporarily house victims in southern Russia. Another group that received over 8.2 million rubles to

support children during their parents' acrimonious divorces "only tangentially" mentions domestic violence, Open Media said.

"It seems like they're trying to squeeze out NGOs working on domestic violence from domestic funding this year, forcing them to shut down or look for funds abroad," Open Media quoted an unnamed rejected applicant as saying.

"If we go for foreign funding, there's a danger of being labeled a foreign agent."

Funding for NGOs that support victims of domestic violence dwindled from 16.5 million rubles in 2019 to 2 million rubles last year, Open Media said.

The 30 million rubles that Russian domestic violence initiatives received in presidential grants since 2017 amounts to half the amount awarded to projects promoting "traditional family values" over the same period, Open Media said.

The outlet reported that several million rubles have been directed to projects aimed at preventing divorce and drawing from Orthodox Christian traditions to strengthen families in 2021.

Domestic violence NGOs interviewed by Open Media criticized the funding cuts, saying they are put "on the brink of existence" and leave victims helpless in the absence of legal protections.

Russia decriminalized first-time abuse offenses in 2017, a move that lawmakers had been working to overturn with new legislation before the coronavirus pandemic broke out. Russia's senate speaker has vowed to resume debate of the country's delayed domestic violence bill as soon as "circumstances permit."

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