

Global Patterns and Persistent Risks: A Snapshot of Torture and Ill-Treatment in 26 countries

The risk of torture and other ill-treatment remains alarmingly high across the globe. While specific contexts increase vulnerability - such as detention, protest settings, or reprisals against human rights work - no region or country is immune. This is one of the central findings of the Global Torture Index, which captures a picture across a wide range of political systems, from consolidated democracies to authoritarian regimes. While some countries show areas of good practice, the overall picture is one of deficient implementation, structural violence, scarcity of data, and systemic impunity.

Real change demands, among others, political will, legal reform, independent complaint mechanisms, access to places of deprivation of liberty, and a victim-centered approach in the justice system, connected to well-resourced rehabilitation programmes. Above all, Index findings show need for States to treat torture not as isolated facts, but as a global crisis that must be addressed with urgency, transparency, and accountability.

Risk analysis across the 26 countries

The data reveals a concerning global picture regarding the risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Six countries — Bahrain, Belarus, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Libya, and the Russian Federation — are identified as *very high risk*, characterised by systematic violations of the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, with very weak safeguards to prevent and protect from instances of torture and ill-treatment. Thirteen additional countries, including India, Mexico, Nigeria, Tunisia and Turkey, fall under *high risk*, marked by serious shortcomings in upholding human rights and implementing anti-torture safeguards, suggesting significant challenges. Countries such as Argentina and Hungary are categorized as *considerable risk*, where while there may be a legal and institutional framework in place, gaps in enforcement and protection measures indicate ongoing problems in preventing and eradicating torture and other ill-treatment. Even *moderate risk* countries like Italy and Spain although they demonstrate progress toward aligning with international human rights standards, implementation remains inconsistent.

Thematic pillars indicators reinforce the scale of the problem: **Police brutality** is at *high risk* in 18 countries, indicating lack of safeguards and mechanisms to prevent torture and other ill-treatment in the context of law enforcement operations and during arrest, police custody, and interrogation, as well as during public assemblies and border control. **Freedom from Torture while in Detention** carry a *high risk* in 15 countries, highlighting widespread concerns over inhumane treatment, overcrowding, limited legal protections, with weak oversight mechanisms for accountability and monitoring. **Victims' rights** are under *very high risk* in 12 countries, suggesting limited access to justice, redress, comprehensive rehabilitation and protection measures. **Impunity** is rated *very high risk* in 9 countries and *high risk* in 12, reflecting institutional failures to investigate or prosecute acts of torture, hindering accountability and effective remedies for victims and survivors. Meanwhile, **Protection for all** is considered *high risk* in 16 countries, highlighting little progress in protecting specific groups and individuals—such as children, women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and ethnic minorities—and in specific contexts, such as in national security situations. **Right to defend and civic space** is similarly worrying with 10 countries at a *high risk* and 7 in *very high risk*, emphasising weak legal frameworks and institutional practices to protect Human Rights Defenders and civil society organisations from risks faced due to their human rights work, including constraint ability to monitor human rights, operate freely and document abuses without restrictions. Finally, **Political commitment against torture** is at *considerable risk* in 12 countries, pointing to a possible

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increased State's legal obligations and United Nations treaty ratifications, but still a lack of implementation of basic anti-torture commitments and public policies in line with the UN Convention Against Torture.

Regional analysis of the most concerning thematic pillars related to the risk of torture and ill-treatment, based on the Index results:

- In **Africa**, the predominant risks are very high for ending impunity, and high for both ending police brutality and victims' rights.
- In the **Americas**, freedom from torture while in detention present a very high risk, while the right to defend and ending police brutality are each at high risk.
- In **Asia**, victims' rights face a very high risk, and both freedom from torture while in detention and ending impunity are at high risk.
- In **Europe**, although risks are somewhat lower, victims' rights, ending impunity, and freedom from torture while in detention are all categorized as considerable risk.
- The Middle East and North Africa (**MENA**) region is marked by consistently very high risk across the pillars of victims' rights, right to defend, and ending impunity.

Normative anti-torture framework

Only **India and Malaysia** have failed to ratify the UN Convention against Torture (CAT) out of the 26 countries. Worldwide, 175 countries have ratified this instrument, marking a near-universal commitment to its principles. While ratification is a crucial first step, the Index shows that real implementation often lags behind. 18 out of 26 countries surveyed criminalize torture as a standalone offense, and 15 criminalise attempted torture. Yet, 17 countries still allow amnesties or legal exemptions that undermine accountability.

14 countries have established National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs), as required under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). While NPMs are a vital tool in preventing abuse in places of detention, they remain underdeveloped or absent in most of the countries assessed.

Structural Drivers of Risk: Law Enforcement and Protests

The use of force by law enforcement is a critical driver of risk. In 13 countries, the use of firearms in policing is not exceptional. In 4 countries, **Indonesia, Libya, the Philippines, and Ethiopia**, firearms are used frequently during law enforcement operations resulting in severe injuries requiring hospitalization. Deaths resulting from such interventions are reported as frequent in these countries, along with in **Honduras and Argentina**.

The repression of peaceful assemblies is another alarming trend, with incidents that may amount of torture and other ill-treatment being documented at a global scale. A majority of countries fail to issue warnings before using force to disperse protests, and few prioritise dialogue or de-escalation.

Torture and ill-treatment at the Borders

Excessive use of force at borders is frequent in **Libya, Spain, Belarus, Tunisia, and Hungary**, with Belarus and Tunisia reporting frequent deaths at border crossings. These trends reflects the securitisation of migration and a disregard for basic safeguards to guarantee the dignity and personal integrity of persons who are forced to leave their countries.

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Safeguards in the first hours of arrest

The risk of torture spikes in the first hours of police custody. Yet, only 5 countries report video surveillance in police stations, including in **Spain, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova**. In 14 countries, incommunicado detention - where detainees are denied access to lawyers, family, or oversight - occurs frequently or very often, significantly increasing the risk of torture, those are: **Cameroon, Pakistan, Mexico, Belarus, Colombia, Philippines, Nigeria, Tunisia, Honduras, El Salvador, India, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Bahrain**.

Detention conditions and groups in situation of vulnerability

Deaths in custody are frequently reported in **Honduras, Argentina, Mexico, Kyrgyzstan, El Salvador, Philippines, Italy, India, Democratic Republic of Congo**. Overcrowding exceeds 120% capacity in 14 countries: **Indonesia, Honduras, Cameroon, Pakistan, El Salvador, Colombia, Philippines, Italy, Nigeria, Togo, India, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia**.

Children in detention face serious abuses: in 10 countries, they are subjected to physical restraints, degrading searches, and humiliation (**Honduras, Argentina, Pakistan, Spain, Colombia, Togo, India, Tunisia, Hungary and Bahrain**). In 6 countries, children are often held in solitary confinement: **Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Colombia, Philippines, Bahrain**.

Access to places of deprivation of liberty

In order to detect risks and ensure prevention safeguards, it is crucial to ensure access to places of deprivation of liberty by independent monitors, including civil society organisations. In 11 countries, civil society organisations do not have access to places of deprivation of liberty or very limited on their own: **Malaysia, Libya, Spain, Russian Federation, El Salvador, Belarus, Turkey, India, Hungary, Ethiopia, Bahrain**. **Argentina, Pakistan, Spain**, CSOs can access if they are integrated in State monitoring mechanisms. **Argentina and Italy** have laws authorizing CSOs and other actors to undertake independent visits to places of detention.

Lack of data

A striking and consistent concern is the lack of disaggregated, publicly available data on torture and ill-treatment. Most countries surveyed fail to report on investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and disciplinary sanctions in cases of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence. **Nigeria** stands out as the most accessible among the countries surveyed.

Reprisals – Failure to secure a right to seek remedy

This data gap is mirrored by the obstacles victims face in accessing justice. Data show that victims are often discouraged from lodging complaints, including through threats of reprisals. In 8 countries these incidents are very likely: **Honduras, Libya, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Colombia, Philippines, Turkey, India**, de facto preventing the right to access to a remedy. In 9 countries reprisals and intimidation are often a reality: **Pakistan, Mexico, Spain, El Salvador, Moldova, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Hungary and Ethiopia**.

Medico-legal examinations, victim support and rehabilitation

When cases are investigated, judges in 17 countries often order medico-legal examinations. However, the Istanbul Protocol, the international standard for investigating torture, is rarely used or accepted as legal evidence.

Only 2 countries offer psychological support to torture victims during investigation/trial, same countries that enshrine in law the provision of programmes for the rehabilitation of victims of torture and other ill-treatment (**Mexico, Hungary**).

Human rights defenders at risk worldwide

Human rights defenders are targeted in a very significant number of countries. In 6 countries - **Honduras, Cameroon, Libya, Belarus, Colombia, and Ethiopia** - they are frequently subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Judicial harassment is widespread: in 17 countries, defenders are regularly targeted through courts. And one of the most striking findings: in 11 countries human rights defenders have been forced into exile in the last 3 years: **Honduras, Pakistan, Mexico, Spain, Belarus, Colombia, Philippines, Togo, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia**.

Femicides and gender-based violence

Data on femicides, and their investigation and prosecution, is scarce. Where data exists, it points to urgent concerns. **Honduras and Libya** report femicide rates between 2 and 2.4 per 100,000 women. Conviction rates remain low, with Italy reporting that a majority of femicide investigations (75-100%) result in convictions.