



**Observatoire ARGA**

Report on Sanctions and Compliance for 2025

## **WOMEN IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES**

### **Gender-Based Persecution, Corporate Power Struggles, Digital Violence, and International Protection**

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## Executive Summary

Women in authoritarian, clan-oligarchic and hybrid regimes across Eurasia face a distinct and highly specific form of political-coercive persecution. Unlike classical cases—where the primary targets of repression are male politicians, business elites and activists—women are subjected to dual pressure: as political actors *and* as a socially vulnerable group against whom regimes employ methods that extend far beyond standard instruments of coercion.

Since the late 2010s, a new configuration of persecution has intensified, including:

- fabricated criminal cases against women entrepreneurs, lawyers, journalists, researchers;
- gender-specific coercion by security services, including threats of sexualised violence, humiliation, psychological intimidation, blackmail with intimate information;
- corporate attacks in business conflicts, where a woman is used as the “vulnerable link” to pressure a male partner or company owner;
- cyber-harassment, targeted trolling, doxxing, digital stalking, and deep fake-based discreditation, aiming to destroy reputation and isolate women socially and professionally;
- manipulation involving children and family members—restrictions on travel, threats of loss of parental rights, retention of children inside the country as leverage;
- transnational persecution through Interpol notices, extradition requests, MLAT communications, and cross-border freezing of bank accounts;
- economic and corporate coercion, including punitive asset seizures, forced divestment, and gender-targeted forms of raiding and corporate intimidation.

A woman in such regimes becomes not merely a target of repression—she becomes both a threat (as a carrier of sensitive internal information) and a convenient target (as a socially vulnerable figure whose persecution is easier to disguise and implement).

ARGA Observatory identifies a systemic trend:

1. Women increasingly become central figures in political-economic cases, especially when they possess access to corporate archives, financial documentation, corruption-related evidence, or insider information.
2. Gender-based persecution is becoming transnational, involving digital operations, international legal tools, cross-border intimidation and multi-jurisdictional pressure.
3. International protection mechanisms are structurally insufficient, as standard refugee frameworks and Interpol procedures fail to account for gender-specific tools of coercion and hybrid persecution.

This report develops an analytical model allowing:

- identification of gender-driven political-economic persecution,

- systematisation of evidentiary patterns,
- construction of legal arguments for cross-border protection,
- development of international safeguards—from human-rights expertise to filings before CCF, UN WGAD, the ECtHR, UN Women, and Gender-Asylum mechanisms.

This document serves as a foundational framework for reforming international protection systems for women subjected to political-economic and hybrid coercive persecution in Eurasian states.

## 1. Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining legal analysis, criminology, gender studies, research into transnational coercive practices, and digital security. The goal was to identify structural patterns of persecution of women in authoritarian systems, document the mechanisms of pressure, and determine international legal tools for protection.

The report relies on the following sources and analytical directions:

1. Analysis of cases involving female political prisoners and women entrepreneurs subjected to criminal prosecution, corporate raiding, coercive pressure, or transnational extradition attempts. Court materials, legal opinions, victim testimonies, and procedural documentation were used.
2. Data from international human rights organisations, including UN Women, OHCHR, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, containing information on torture, discrimination, gender-based violence, and coercive persecution in Eurasia. These sources were used to compare national practices with global protection standards.
3. A database of 76 empirical cases (2016–2025) involving women in Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Belarus. For each case, the study documented the factual basis of the accusations, links to corporate or political conflicts, threats to family members, digital pressure, and international dynamics.
4. Materials on family and corporate conflicts, in which women were used as instruments of pressure on a business partner, asset owner, or an internal corporate whistleblower. The analysis included cases of unlawful deprivation of parental rights, coercion through divorce, and economic sanctions within the family structure.
5. Research on Interpol Abuse against women, including Red Notices, diffusion notices, MLAT requests, as well as cases where economic charges were used as legal cover for political or corporate motives.
6. Study of digital violence, including cyber-harassment, device hacks, deepfake pornography, dissemination of personal data, digital extortion, surveillance through spyware, and OSINT-based doxxing.
7. ARGA Observatory research (2020–2025) on gender security, political-economic persecution, and international mechanisms of legal protection for women, which complemented the comparative and structural analysis.

The methodology aims not only to document violations but also to identify recurring patterns, enabling the development of predictive risk models and the design of international protection mechanisms for women persecuted by authoritarian states.

## 2. Introduction: Gender as a Risk Factor in Authoritarian Systems

In authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes across Eurasia, gender has ceased to be merely a social characteristic and has instead become a political and legal trigger determining an individual's level of vulnerability to the state. In such systems, women are more often not subjects but *points of coercion* through which authorities gain leverage over men — entrepreneurs, officials, security personnel, opposition figures, or asset holders. Thus, a woman may not formally be a participant in a conflict but in practice becomes its epicentre, functioning as an intermediary, a hostage, or an instrument of negotiation.

Gender-based vulnerability is neither accidental nor secondary — it is embedded in the political-economic mechanisms of authoritarian states. Women become involved in persecution as defendants in criminal cases, witnesses to corruption schemes, beneficiaries of assets, and custodians of family financial links. They are frequently targeted through children, threats of sexualised violence, house arrest, digital humiliation, and public smear campaigns. These threats are directed not only at the woman herself but at the person the authorities seek to break or coerce — a business partner, a political opponent, an asset owner, or a high-profile figure under investigation.

Particularly vulnerable are female business owners, analysts, whistleblowers, lawyers, and corporate actors whose knowledge and access to information can shift power balances. For states and oligarchic clans, such women represent a dual threat: they can expose illegal capital flight schemes, violent corporate takeovers, crypto-financing channels, and international lobbying operations. Therefore, persecution is not merely punitive but also preventive — its purpose is to ensure that the woman does not disclose information, provide testimony, submit a complaint to a European court, or become a source of leaks for international media.

Meanwhile, the international protection system is not adapted to this new reality. Gender-based persecution is often disguised as family disputes, tax conflicts, corporate claims, or even minor domestic offences. Such cases are poorly recognised by European courts as political, fail to meet established persecution criteria, and consequently leave women without protection. This creates a legal vacuum in which a woman does not fall under the classical definition of a political refugee yet simultaneously faces systematic persecution and a real risk of physical harm.

In many cases, a woman becomes the only vulnerable segment of an elite accessible to security services — particularly when the primary target has already left the country or obtained political asylum. In such situations, authorities exert pressure on the woman through criminal cases, searches, asset seizures, threats of loss of parental rights, bank account freezes, and travel restrictions. Gender thus becomes a channel for extraterritorial influence over the male target, and the woman becomes a bargaining instrument between the state and political or corporate elites.

Thus, in an authoritarian system, gender is not a secondary social parameter but a strategic mechanism for exerting pressure and controlling capital, loyalty, and information flows. A woman is transformed from a participant in the conflict into a systemic bearer of risk, and protection against such pressure requires new international legal instruments that extend beyond the classical refugee framework.

## 3. Typologies of Persecution of Women

The persecution of women in authoritarian regimes is not a secondary phenomenon. It is a structural mechanism of political and economic control that follows several established models. Each is applied deliberately and reproduced across different Eurasian states, allowing us to speak not about isolated cases but about a clear typology.

### 3.1. Political Persecution

Women are subjected to criminal prosecution as:

- participants in protest movements,
- coordinators of civic resistance initiatives,
- public figures who criticized the authorities,
- as well as relatives and partners of political activists.

Repression is aimed not only at punishment but at suppressing protest potential. Women are used as demonstrative targets: their detentions cause greater public outrage, and threats of sexualized violence amplify the intimidation effect.

### 3.2. Economic and Corporate Persecution

Women who own assets, co-own businesses, or are married to entrepreneurs become targets of:

- criminal cases for “fraud” or “tax evasion”,
- corporate raiding attacks,
- attempts to redistribute property through courts.

In corporate conflicts, women often become tools for indirect pressure on business beneficiaries when the primary target is abroad or protected. A typical scheme: initiating a criminal case against the wife → freezing assets → demanding the transfer of a business share or the signing of a renunciation of ownership.

### 3.3. Family Conflicts as a State Instrument

Family law becomes an area of political manipulation. Authorities use:

- criminal cases for “abuse” without evidence,
- deprivation of parental rights as leverage,
- prosecution of minor domestic incidents as a pretext for detention.

The goal is to break the woman’s will, isolate her, and create leverage over the male target. A frequently observed pattern is the *hostage family doctrine*: children are turned into hostages in negotiations between state structures and the political or economic target.

### **3.4. Pressure Through Husbands and Partners**

Security agencies persecute women not as defendants but as carriers of access to the main target. The mechanism follows a predictable chain:

criminal case against the husband → searches and detentions of the wife → pressure to obtain documents, access to assets, or information.

A woman becomes an intermediary through whom authorities attempt to retrieve capital, obtain testimony, or break resistance. This is one of the most common practices in Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus.

### **3.5. Gender-Based Violence as a Method of Political Control**

Threats of sexualized violence are a systemic method of controlling women. They include:

- threats of rape during interrogations,
- actual instances of physical coercion,
- threats of retaliation if she seeks protection abroad.

Unlike men, women experience sexual threats with far greater psychological impact, making them an effective instrument of coercion. International law qualifies such acts as torture.

### **3.6. Digital Violence and Cyber Harassment**

With technological advancement, digital pressure has become a key element of persecution. Documented practices include:

- hacking of smartphones and Telegram/WhatsApp accounts,
- monitoring of geolocation and communications,
- publication of personal data and “leaks of intimate photos”,
- deepfake-based kompromat.

Digital persecution is used to destroy reputation, create social isolation, and suppress a woman’s public activity. In many cases, these attacks are coordinated with security agencies.

## **4. Regional Map of Gender-Based Risks**

Gender persecution in authoritarian systems of Eurasia is heterogeneous, yet a common pattern persists everywhere: women are used as instruments of control, coercion, and leverage in political, economic, and security conflicts. The difference between countries lies in the dominant mechanism of repression — from criminal charges to digital violence, from family manipulation to direct coercion into cooperation.

## 4.1. Russia

Russia is the largest source of women's political and economic persecution cases in the post-Soviet region. Documented practices include:

- persecution of women activists and opposition journalists who participated in protests or cooperated with human rights groups;
- criminal cases and searches targeting wives of political prisoners — pressure based on a *family hostage doctrine*;
- fabrication of criminal cases against businesswomen owning assets sought by security services or competitors;
- economic pressure on women when the primary targets (husbands/partners) reside abroad.

Women become the vulnerable link in conflicts between the state and business, especially in cases involving capital repatriation, corporate wars, and “economic treason” charges.

## 4.2. Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, the persecution of women is most often tied to economic and elite competition. Patterns include:

- cases against wives of businessmen under the “asset return” campaign launched after the 2022 political restructuring;
- pressure on spouses of former officials targeted by clans and security groups;
- threats against children and relatives as leverage during extradition attempts or efforts to recover capital;
- cases in which women are coerced into transferring property or providing testimony.

Gender functions as a lever in corporate conflicts and resource struggles.

## 4.3. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan

The harshest forms of coercion are documented in Central Asia. Gender-specific persecution here is driven not only by state pressure, but also by traditional and patriarchal norms exploited by the authorities as instruments of repression.

Key risks include:

- criminal cases against businesswomen who actively manage enterprises or hold controlling stakes;
- use of gender stereotypes in court — “immoral behavior” as a basis for criminal pressure;
- sexualized violence in detention facilities, documented in several human rights reports;
- use of children and guardianship mechanisms as tools of subordination.



In these countries, a woman may be punished not for what she has done — but for the mere fact of her independence.

#### 4.4. Azerbaijan

Some of the most aggressive forms of pressure on women are observed in Azerbaijan, especially in cases connected to political-corruption networks.

Common mechanisms include:

- criminal prosecution of women to pressure male defendants in major cases;
- forcing women to testify as “holders of evidence” under threat of arrest;
- smear campaigns involving sexualized narratives;
- persecution of women in cases tied to oil, gas, and state-investment assets.

A woman becomes a point of access into a political conflict.

#### 4.5. Georgia and Armenia

In the South Caucasus, digital and financial-economic methods dominate.

Documented practices include:

- hacking of phones, doxing, publication of personal data, and fabricated intimate materials aimed at reputation destruction;
- pressure via cryptocurrency operations and fintech channels, accusing women of facilitating financial schemes;
- use of Interpol and international extradition mechanisms against businesswomen linked to foreign corporate structures;
- a softer but systematic form of repression — social and reputational annihilation.

Here repression is less physical, but more digital, reputational, and psychologically targeted.

## 5. Case Studies

### Case 1 — A Woman as a Key Witness in a Political-Economic Case

**Central mechanism:** pressure through family and sexualized threats to obtain testimony.

In a number of cases studied by ARGA Observatory (2020–2025), women with access to information on budget allocation, business contracts, or corruption networks of officials became the central link in criminal prosecutions—even when the formal defendant was a man: a husband, partner, or head of an organization.

**Typical scenario:**

- a case is initiated against the husband or partner on economic charges (usually analogues of Criminal Code arts. 159, 160, 174, 199);
- the woman is declared the holder of key information and is coerced into giving testimony;
- pressure is applied through children — threats of losing custody, bans on the child’s departure, criminal cases against relatives;
- political-gender blackmail is used: threats of sexualized violence, publication of intimate photos, interrogations with degrading elements;
- if the main defendant flees the country, international persecution is launched against the spouse — Red Notice, extradition requests, asset freezes abroad.

**Result:**

The woman becomes a *witness-hostage* of the system, with her body and her family used as tools of pressure. In many cases, the only protection was filing applications with the CCF (Interpol), UN WGAD, the ECtHR, or seeking asylum in the EU.

## Case 2 — A Businesswoman Targeted in a Corporate War

**Central mechanism:** economic prosecution + international reputational destruction.

Women who own companies or are co-beneficiaries of business assets represent a high-risk group in corporate conflicts where security services and business factions compete for control. A pattern of *commercial criminalization* is applied:

- fabrication of tax and financial charges (tax evasion, fictitious transactions, money laundering);
- searches, asset seizures, travel bans, and freezing of corporate accounts;
- parallel media assault — articles on “theft,” “corruption,” “tax fraud,” portraying the woman as incompetent or “immoral”;
- the real intermediate goal is not imprisonment but forced transfer of business assets, surrender of shares, or signing waivers;
- if the businesswoman leaves the country, transnational mechanisms begin: Interpol notices, MLAT-based asset requests, pressure on EU/UAE banks.

**Specific feature:**

A woman is attacked simultaneously as an economic actor and a social object, with sexist media rhetoric used to destroy her credibility.

According to ARGAs Observatory, in 42% of cases, criminal proceedings were dropped immediately after the transfer of assets.

## Case 3 — A Whistleblower Targeted for Exposing Corruption

**Central mechanism:** transnational persecution for leaking information.

Women insiders (IT specialists, accountants, lawyers, procurement officers) are increasingly documented as witnesses of major financial violations and become sources of disclosures—leaks of tender documents, audit files, or correspondence of state officials.

**Typical path of persecution:**

- publication or transfer of documents to journalists → initiation of a criminal case (“data theft,” “disclosure of secrets”);
- threats to life, surveillance, recruitment attempts, offers of “silence in exchange for safety”;
- relocation abroad is followed immediately by a Red Notice, SIS II entry, MLAT requests;
- pressure on relatives remaining in the country, threats to review child custody;
- attempts at extradition disguised as economic charges, despite the political nature of the case (in violation of UNCAT and Article 3 ECHR).

This category is a *new and rapidly growing class of digital whistleblowers*, in which the woman is perceived not as a vulnerable subject but as a systemic threat — hence the severity of repression.

Cases of this kind have a higher potential for international protection, but only when threats and political motivation are properly documented.

## 6. International Legal Framework for the Protection of Women

### 1. CEDAW — Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CEDAW is the core international instrument that defines gender protection as a *state obligation*, not a political declaration. The Convention requires states to prevent discrimination against women in political, economic, judicial, and social spheres, and to establish mechanisms for investigating violations, including violence committed by state authorities.

In the context of authoritarian regimes, CEDAW serves as the legal basis for complaints involving:

- criminal prosecution of women,
- use of children as leverage,
- restrictions on freedom of movement,
- interference with economic activity.

In cases of political-economic persecution, CEDAW is invoked as evidence of *systemic discrimination* and gender-based persecution.

## 2. European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) — Articles 2, 3, 5, 8, 14

The ECHR provides direct guarantees protecting women from arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, unlawful interference in family life, and discrimination based on sex.

- Art. 2 and 3 apply in cases involving threats of sexualized violence, torture, and psychological coercion.
- Art. 5 applies when criminal prosecution of a woman is politically or economically motivated.
- Art. 8 protects motherhood, family, and children, and is central in cases where minors are held by the state as leverage.
- Art. 14 allows a finding of gender discrimination even when the formal charge is framed as an “economic” offense.

The ECHR is the primary legal tool in cases involving Interpol Abuse, extradition, political-economic repression, and digital harassment.

## 3. UNCAT — Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment

UNCAT establishes an absolute, non-derogable prohibition of torture, sexualized violence, degrading treatment, and threats of physical harm. It is the central norm preventing the extradition of women to states where there is a risk of:

- physical or sexual violence,
- coercion to obtain confessions,
- pressure exerted through threats to family members.

The non-refoulement principle applies even in cases involving serious criminal allegations and is used to block extradition when charges have political, clan-based, corporate, or economically motivated origins.

UNCAT is crucial for protecting women witnesses, whistleblowers, and the wives of persecuted businessmen.

## 4. Istanbul Convention — Protection from Physical, Psychological, and Digital Violence

The Istanbul Convention treats violence against women as a *legal* phenomenon requiring state accountability, not as a cultural or social issue. It covers not only physical and sexualized violence but also:

- digital harassment,

- cyberstalking and dissemination of private materials,
- spyware surveillance,
- threats to children and family as a tool of coercion.

The Istanbul Convention is particularly important in cases where women become targets in corporate conflicts, political repression, Interpol-driven persecution, and digital attacks initiated by security services or affiliated media networks.

## 5. UN WGAD and UN Special Rapporteurs (SR Torture, SR Violence Against Women, SR Human Rights Defenders)

These mechanisms provide *rapid, individualized protection* in cases where women face:

- political prosecution,
- risk of extradition,
- sexualized coercion,
- digital violence.

UN WGAD may declare detention arbitrary, demand release, or issue urgent appeals. Special Rapporteurs can request explanations from governments, initiate inquiries, and issue Opinions carrying significant international weight.

Appeals to WGAD and UN Special Rapporteurs have become essential emergency instruments for protecting women targeted for extradition, coerced testimony, loss of business assets, deprivation of custody, or arbitrary detention.

## 7. Forecast 2025–2027

### 1. Increase in the number of women refugees from security and corporate systems

In the coming years, a steady rise is expected in the number of women leaving authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes—not only as “traditional” political activists but also as members of elite and near-elite circles. This includes wives and partners of high-ranking officials, businessmen, top managers of state corporations, and female employees within the security or corporate apparatus who become either witnesses to major corruption schemes or targets of coercion and threats.

A trend visible in Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan is clear: the harsher the struggle for assets and influence becomes, the more often women are turned into hostages of family and corporate dynamics, or the only individuals capable of leaving the country while preserving access to documents, evidence, and financial records.

This will lead to an increase in asylum cases where women's status is intertwined with political and economic elements, requiring attention not only to domestic repression but also to *transnational threats* posed by security services.

## 2. Intensification of measures against digital violence

Digital violence against women—phone hacking, spyware surveillance, publication of intimate materials, harassment campaigns, and reputational attacks—has already moved beyond the category of “private” or “moral” matters and is increasingly recognized as a form of structural violence and political-economic coercion.

Between 2025 and 2027, stronger regulatory measures are expected at the Council of Europe, EU, and national levels, including:

- clearer recognition of digital gender-based violence in criminal law,
- special procedures for victim protection,
- development of evidentiary standards for digital attacks in asylum and extradition cases.

This is especially critical for women from authoritarian regimes, where smear campaigns frequently include threats of sexualized violence, fake intimate materials, and cyberstalking designed to destroy their credibility as applicants, witnesses, or entrepreneurs.

It is likely that digital-violence expert assessments will become a standard basis for blocking extradition and granting protection.

## 3. Strengthening European witness protection mechanisms

With the rise of cases involving money laundering, corruption, sanctions evasion, and corporate conflicts, women increasingly serve as key witnesses—either through family connections or through access to internal records and informal information networks.

European states and institutions are expected to strengthen witness-protection programmes by:

- expanding possibilities for data anonymization,
- introducing special measures for protecting witnesses' families,
- enabling secure modes of participation (remote questioning, closed hearings, media publication bans).

This may lead to the emergence of a distinct category of gender-sensitive witness protection, addressing not only risks of physical persecution but also threats of sexualized violence, reputational destruction, child abduction, and coercion by former partners.

For women from authoritarian regimes, this will provide a real—not merely declarative—mechanism for participating in investigations without facing total personal and familial destruction.

## 4. Growth of Interpol Abuse against women as a form of pressure on men

The practice of using women as “surrogate targets” in political-economic and corporate conflicts will likely intensify. There are already documented cases where, lacking formal grounds to prosecute the main male figure—entrepreneur, official, opposition member—security structures initiate cases against his wife, partner, or female relative to:

- force him to return,
- pressure him into negotiations,
- compel the transfer of assets.

Between 2025 and 2027, this dynamic is expected to surface more clearly in Interpol Abuse: Red Notices and diffusion requests against women under ostensibly “economic” charges will increasingly bear an obvious political-gender context.

In response, CCF is expected to adopt stricter standards for complaints in which gender, family ties to the main target, and economic charges appear together—treating this combination as a strong indicator of abuse.

However, until such reforms fully take effect, international protection for these women will remain fragmented and unpredictable, heightening the risks of detention, temporary arrest, and travel restrictions.

## 5. Politicization of family law at the international level

Family disputes—child custody, divorce, division of assets—are increasingly used by authoritarian regimes as an extension of political-economic conflicts. In the coming years, the number of cases where family law and human rights law intersect will grow sharply:

- state bodies initiating “child protection” procedures based on political loyalty or disloyalty of parents,
- restriction of children’s exit from the country,
- launching “child abduction” charges against mothers who flee abroad,
- creating conditions in which women must choose between safety and maintaining contact with their children.

Internationally, this will intensify complex extradition and civil-law disputes in which authoritarian states attempt to weaponize the Hague Conventions on International Child Abduction and elements of private international law.

In response, European and other democratic jurisdictions are likely to develop the doctrine of “politicized family law case”, recognizing that custody, alimony, deprivation of parental rights, or “family crime” prosecutions may conceal a political or corporate motive.

This will strengthen the role of gender-sensitive analysis in decisions on extradition, custody, and international protection for women caught in such conflicts.

## 8. ARGA Observatory Recommendations

### 8.1. For International Institutions

#### **1. Establish a monitoring mechanism for gender-based persecution in authoritarian regimes**

At the level of the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and regional bodies (including EU structures), there is a need for a dedicated, stable mechanism for monitoring gender-based persecution in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian systems. This concerns not only “classical” violence against women, but also cases where:

- women become targets of criminal prosecution because of actions taken by men (husbands, partners, fathers, brothers);
- family and custody cases are used as tools of pressure against political opponents or entrepreneurs;
- digital violence and cyberstalking are employed as part of repressive campaigns.

Such a mechanism could include:

- a specialised case registry (anonymised, but suitable for pattern analysis),
- regular regional reports (CIS, Caucasus, Central Asia, etc.),
- dedicated indicators of gendered political persecution and family-based retaliation, which would be taken into account when assessing the human rights situation in a given country.

#### **2. Integrate women’s cases into sanctions reports and sanctions regimes**

Sanctions regimes (EU, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, etc.) still focus primarily on:

- security officials,
- political figures,
- major business actors.

Meanwhile, women who become victims of political-economic persecution often appear only as “context” or “background.” ARGA recommends:

- including gender-based repression (threats of sexualized violence, pressure through children, fabricated family or “moral” cases) as grounds for personal sanctions;
- documenting gender-specific patterns in sanctions reports: cases where women are denied the right to leave the country, stripped of custody, subjected to defamation or violence as a means of pressuring another person;
- treating grave cases of digital violence against women (e.g., organised publication of intimate materials combined with political demands) as a form of repression comparable to “traditional” political persecution.



This would help bring women's cases out of invisibility and incorporate them into the formal architecture of international pressure on regimes that practice such abuses.

### **3. Strengthen the protection of women-witnesses in international and national procedures**

Women increasingly act as:

- key witnesses in cases involving corruption, money laundering, and sanctions evasion;
- sources of information about the internal workings of security and corporate structures;
- intermediaries with access to documents and digital evidence.

At the same time, they face a combined risk: threats, defamation, pressure through children, attempts at abduction, or forced “return” through family-law mechanisms.

International institutions (UN, Council of Europe, EU agencies) should:

- introduce special protection standards for women-witnesses, taking into account the risks of sexualized violence, family-based coercion, and digital persecution;
- recommend that states apply more flexible confidentiality regimes (closed hearings, anonymisation, bans on publishing personal data) when women testify against elites, security services, or major business actors;
- integrate the gender-vulnerability dimension into complaint procedures within UN mechanisms (WGAD, Special Rapporteurs, etc.) and within European monitoring frameworks.

## **8.2. For Courts of the EU, the United Kingdom, and the United States**

### **1. Expand the practice of protecting women from extradition to authoritarian regimes**

Courts applying the ECHR, UNCAT, and national protection standards already possess tools for refusing extradition on the basis of risks of torture, inhuman treatment, and unfair trials. However, in cases involving women, additional gender-specific risk parameters are crucial:

- the likelihood of sexualized violence in detention facilities;
- the use of children and family ties as instruments of coercion;
- stigmatization and harassment of a “non-obedient” woman in patriarchal contexts.

ARGA recommends:

- explicitly acknowledging in judicial decisions that gender-oriented violence and family-based coercion in authoritarian regimes constitute independent grounds for refusing extradition, even when a case is formally labelled as “economic” or “corruption-related”;
- more actively applying the doctrines of risk enhancement and vulnerability, recognizing that a woman connected to an opposition figure, entrepreneur, or former official is inherently at higher risk of abuse than an “average” defendant.

## **2. Recognize gender-based persecution as political in nature**

Many cases against women are disguised as:

- family disputes;
- moral/reputational conflicts;
- allegations of fraud, tax evasion, or “immoral behaviour.”

Judicial authorities must move beyond a strictly formal analysis of the charges and address the broader context:

- the existence of a political or corporate conflict surrounding the male partner;
- the woman’s involvement in human-rights work or public advocacy;
- the use of intimate information, children, or family status as coercive tools.

Recognizing this complex as politically motivated persecution with a gender component would:

- enable more consistent refusals of extradition;
- create a jurisprudence where a woman is not treated as a “secondary” or “incidental” figure, but as a targeted actor in a political-economic conflict;
- strengthen legal standards that directly link gender-based violence with violations of political rights and freedoms.

## **8.3. For Academia and Research Centers**

### **1. Develop gender criminology in the context of authoritarian regimes**

Current criminology often describes repression and corporate warfare in gender-neutral terms, leaving women at the margins of analysis. ARGA recommends:

- developing a separate research field focused on how women are used as a “linking element” in security, corporate, and political conflicts;
- analysing patterns such as: the woman as a “substitute target,” as a bearer of vulnerable status, as a key witness, and as an instrument of pressure on male opponents of the regime;
- expanding the empirical base of cases — not only political activists, but also businesswomen, wives, daughters, and sisters involved in cases of corruption, money laundering, sanctions evasion, and corporate conflicts.

### **2. Create databases of women’s cases with safe and ethical architecture**

Structural analysis requires datasets, not isolated stories. Academic and analytical institutions should:

- create secure databases of cases in which women have been subjected to criminal prosecution, digital violence, Interpol Abuse, extradition attempts, or family-based coercion;
- classify cases by types of persecution (political, corporate, family-based, digital, mixed), by country, and by mechanisms used (Interpol, extradition, sanctions, media campaigns);
- build risk models and indicators that could be used by lawyers, courts, and international bodies when assessing protection claims.

It is critical to uphold confidentiality, informed consent, and minimization of the risk of re-victimization.

### **3. Conduct interdisciplinary research: law, gender, digital security, economics**

Women's cases in authoritarian regimes lie at the intersection of several disciplines:

- international law and human rights law;
- criminology and the sociology of violence;
- gender studies;
- political science and authoritarianism studies;
- digital security and cyber-law;
- economics and corporate-conflict analysis.

ARGA recommends promoting projects where:

- lawyers work together with cybersecurity and OSINT specialists to document digital violence and surveillance;
- scholars of authoritarianism and political economy analyse the role of women in corporate and force-based conflicts, not only in classical opposition activities;
- practical methodologies are created for lawyers and human-rights defenders: how to document gender-based persecution, how to build evidentiary frameworks for EU/UK/US courts, how to account for digital factors and family-based coercion.

Such interdisciplinarity will transform women's vulnerability from an "invisible problem" into a structured domain of international research and human-rights practice — with direct impact on decisions regarding asylum, extradition, sanctions, and evaluations of authoritarian regimes.

## **9. Conclusion**

Women in the authoritarian political-economic regimes of Eurasia have ceased to be peripheral figures of repression.

They have become central targets of pressure, instruments of control over business elites, participants in corporate wars, and holders of sensitive information about corruption and the

internal functioning of security structures. Female vulnerability in such systems is not accidental but structural: state and security actors use women as leverage against male opponents, clan groups, business structures, and political networks.

Through women, regimes exert pressure, intimidation, blackmail, extraction of information, and coercion into economic or political deals.

Where the rule of law is weakened, the female body, family, reputation, and psychological vulnerability are transformed into tools of political governance.

Transnational mechanisms of persecution — extradition requests, Interpol abuse, digital surveillance, cyberattacks, and cross-border media campaigns — push the problem beyond national jurisdictions. It becomes an international human-rights challenge that affects European security, migration policy, witness protection systems, and the stability of financial flows.

Cases of persecuted businesswomen, lawyers, whistleblowers, and spouses of political figures are now routinely examined by EU courts, UN committees, and migration authorities. Yet existing international norms still rely on an outdated model of asylum, centered on political activists and journalists rather than women caught in economic and corporate conflicts.

Meanwhile, these very categories face forms of pressure that traditional legal frameworks do not adequately capture:

- criminal prosecution as an instrument of corporate coercion,
- retention of children and manipulation of custody,
- threats of sexualized violence,
- fabrication of intimate materials for public humiliation,
- cyberstalking and digital harassment,
- cross-border pursuit using Interpol channels.

ARGA Observatory's findings make clear: a new system of international protection for women is needed — one that recognizes not only political persecution but also economic-corporate coercion, digital violence, family-based pressure, and transnational threats.

The proposed framework treats women as an autonomous category of international law, rather than an adjunct to male-centered cases.

Establishing such a system has strategic significance:

- for the protection of witnesses in corruption and financial cases,
- for the resilience of international judicial institutions,
- for the effectiveness of sanctions regimes,
- for preventing cross-border violence and political retaliation,

– for safeguarding property rights and the security of capital.

Protecting women in authoritarian systems is not only a humanitarian imperative. It is a matter of international security, shaping global economics, politics, justice, and governance.

This report provides the analytical basis for reforms aimed at expanding the legal status of women-asylum seekers, creating mechanisms for documenting digital and economic violence, and recognizing gender-based persecution as a form of political coercion.

Until such a system is built, women remain the first line of attack and the last barrier through which political-economic repression is applied.

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