

GLOBAL TORTURE INDEX: OVERVIEW OF THE SEVEN THEMATIC PILLARS AND TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

This document aims to provide a brief overview of the seven key thematic pillars (sub-themes) measured and analysed in the OMCT's Global Torture Index. Each thematic pillar delves into various specific thematic focuses to thoroughly assess the risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in a given country, in line with international human rights standards.

The conceptual framework of the Global Torture Index is comprised of **7 thematic pillars**, and these are disaggregated into **more than 28 sub-themes**:

1. Political Commitment Against Torture
2. Ending Police Brutality and Institutional Violence
3. Freedom From Torture While Deprived of Liberty
4. Ending Impunity
5. Victims' Rights
6. Protection For All
7. Right To Defend and Civic Space

For more information on the main references, Index content and data analysed, please refer to our *Index Anti-Torture Articles* and the accompanying *Methodology Note*. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact us at tortureindex@omct.org.

Political Commitment Against Torture

What do we measure in this section?

In this section, we intend to measure the State's political and legal commitments in line with international and regional standards towards the prevention of and protection from torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. States' political will to end torture manifests itself in:

- ◆ The ratification of anti-torture treaties and remedies, constructive engagement with their implementation mechanisms, as well as a concrete commitment towards the universal struggle against torture (e.g., UPR, contribution to the UN Voluntary Fund).
- ◆ The effective and adequate incorporation of universal and regional anti-torture standards in domestic law, the existence of credible public policies against torture, and the establishment of dedicated institutions able to prevent and protect from torture.

Table of contents: Political Commitments against Torture and CIDTP

1. INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

- 1.1. Overview of International Human Rights Commitments against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CIDTP)
- 1.2. Engagement with independent international mechanisms for oversight and accountability
 - 1.2.1. Engagement with the UN Committee Against Torture
 - 1.2.2. Engagement with other United Nations mechanisms
 - 1.2.2.1. UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT)
 - 1.2.2.2. UN Special Rapporteur on Torture
 - 1.2.2.3. Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
 - 1.2.2.4. United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
- 1.3. Regional Commitments against Torture and other CIDTP, as applicable
 - 1.3.1. In Europe
 - 1.3.2. In the Americas
 - 1.3.3. In Africa

2. DOMESTIC COMMITMENTS

- 2.1. Review of the Anti-torture framework at the domestic level
- 2.2. Role of National Institutions for the protection of human rights and the prevention of torture

Ending Police Brutality and Institutional Violence

What do we measure in this section?

Law enforcement officials provide a vital public service within societies by serving the community and by protecting all persons against illegal acts. Whilst performing their duty, they must respect and protect human dignity, maintaining and upholding the human rights of all persons in every context. However, this is not always the case. Given that the risk of torture and ill-treatment is higher during the initial period of police custody, arrest, and interrogation, strict legislation and protocols with adequate safeguards are needed, as well as the ability to identify when these are not implemented.

This section intends to measure these safeguards on the use of force by law enforcement officials, from entering into State custody, during the transfer to law enforcement premises and up until release or formalisation to a detention facility (e.g. a prison, immigration centre, military prison, among others), which will be analysed in the next section. Moreover, it analyses the specific situations where the presence of actors with law enforcement functions and their use of force, both custodial and extra-custodial, may result in human rights abuses, particularly affecting specific groups. Thus, we also measure if the State has strong, independent, and efficient monitoring, oversight and accountability mechanisms at the highest levels of compliance with domestic legislation in line with human rights standards. To finalise, a commitment against torture and CIDTP also requires guarantees against a broad range of institutional violence, such as the prohibition of enforced disappearances and the abolition of the death penalty.

Table of contents: Police Brutality and Institutional Violence

1. LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

- 1.1. Ensuring safeguards on the use of force
- 1.2. Guarantees in the context of arrests

2. SAFEGUARDS DURING THE FIRST HOURS OF DETENTION

3. PREVENTION OF TORTURE DURING INTERROGATION AND INVESTIGATION

- 3.1. Interrogation
- 3.2. Investigation

4. CONTEXTS OF PARTICULAR RISK OF EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

- 4.1. Public Assemblies
- 4.2. Extra custodial use of force in border control

5. INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

- 5.1. Death Penalty (if applicable)
- 5.2. Life sentence (if applicable)
- 5.3. Enforced disappearances (if applicable)

6. POLICE OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS

- 6.1. Internal control mechanism (police internal affairs)
- 6.2. External control mechanism (if applicable)

Freedom From Torture While Deprived of Liberty

What do we measure in this section?

This section intends to measure the risk of being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during a period in State custody once the individual is formalised to any detention facility, including the penitentiary system, immigration centres, military prisons, among others. We take the definition of deprivation of liberty as set forth in OPCAT article 4, which ‘...means any form of detention or imprisonment or the placement of a person in a public or private custodial setting which that person is not permitted to leave at will by order of any judicial, administrative or other authority’¹

We analyse the extent to which detention facilities uphold the responsibilities of the State in ensuring humane, safe, and rehabilitative conditions for persons deprived of their liberty, as well as avoiding overcrowding. This includes evaluating the provision of decent detention conditions, the implementation of legal safeguards, the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, and assurance of accountability where violations occur. Key indicators include the existence and effectiveness of complaints mechanisms, the mandate and operation of National Preventive Mechanisms, and the level of access granted to civil society to monitor these facilities. Additionally, we assess the use of pre-trial detention—ensuring it remains an exceptional measure—as well as the application of tailored safeguards for specific groups, including women, children, and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Table of contents: Freedom from Torture whilst Deprived of Liberty

- 1. PROTECTING THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY**
 - 1.1. Regulations, safeguards and cases of violence
 - 1.1.1. Overall Framework in Detention Facilities
 - 1.1.2. Solitary confinement
 - 1.1.3. Injuries and incidents
 - 1.2. Files and record management
- 2. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION**
 - 2.1. Conditions of detention
 - 2.1.1. General Conditions and Population Management
 - 2.1.2. Health services
 - 2.1.3. Searches
 - 2.1.4. Transfers
 - 2.1.5. Accommodation
 - 2.2. Effective mechanisms for complaints
- 3. ATTENTION TO SPECIFIC GROUPS**
 - 3.1. Women
 - 3.2. Children/juveniles
 - 3.3. LGBTQIA+ individuals
 - 3.4. Indigenous peoples (if applicable)
 - 3.5. Other groups (if applicable)
- 4. SPECIFIC SITUATIONS (Optional section)**
 - 4.1. Immigration centres
 - 4.2. Psychiatric establishments under state custody
- 5. MONITORING**
 - 5.1. National Preventive Mechanism (if applicable)
 - 5.2. Other independent mechanisms
- 6. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE**
 - 6.1. Penitentiary management and general figures
 - 6.2. Staff
 - 6.3. Use of pre-trial detention

¹ See *Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* | OHCHR

Ending Impunity

What do we measure in this section?

Despite the absolute prohibition of torture, in many countries, public officials commonly abuse their positions and commit torture and other ill-treatment. Survivors of torture and/or their relatives may wish to seek truth and justice for what has happened. There are different ways to achieve justice, and the survivor determines which way may be more appropriate for them. Seeking accountability, reparations and justice for human rights violations is not an easy path. At times, there are no available legal mechanisms, but even where legal procedures towards justice do exist, they usually take several years, and victims may not trust State institutions.

This section analyses the role of courts and prosecution offices in investigating and sentencing cases of torture and ill-treatment. It emphasises that access to justice must include thorough investigation, timely and fair judicial proceedings, and enforcement of decisions. Key elements for ensuring state accountability include victims' access to multiple complaint channels and legal aid, lack of amnesties for torture cases, as well as the importance of independent, well-trained forensic services for credible medical examinations. This section further examines how impunity often persists in post-conflict, post-dictatorship, or transitional democratic contexts.

Table of contents: Ending Impunity

1. DUTY TO INVESTIGATE

- 1.1. Immunities, amnesties, and military courts
- 1.2. Transitional justice and serious crimes in the past

2. FIGURES ON INVESTIGATION

3. ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- 3.1. Accessibility to complaint mechanisms
- 3.2. Rights of the victim during the investigation and trial
- 3.3. Protection from reprisals following victims' complaints

4. THE ROLE OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN INVESTIGATING AND PROSECUTING TORTURE CASES

- 4.1. Investigative and prosecutorial authority (or analogous institution)
- 4.2. Judges and courts during the trial

5. MEDICO-LEGAL INVESTIGATION

- 5.1. Framework of the recourse to forensic expertise
- 5.2. Quality of forensic expertise
- 5.3. Weight given to forensic expertise by judges

Victims' Rights

What do we measure in this section?

This section analyses the State's responsibility in responding to acts of torture and other ill-treatment, highlighting the need for a comprehensive and victim-centred support system. Once such violations occur, the effectiveness of State mechanisms in providing justice and redress becomes a key indicator of accountability. A robust response should integrate legal, medical, psychological, and social dimensions, reflecting an interdisciplinary and holistic approach aligned with international standards such as the UN Convention Against Torture, including:

- The presence of strong legal frameworks and policies that broadly recognise victims of torture and ensure safeguards for redress and rehabilitation.
- Availability of medical, psychological, and social assistance tailored to victims' needs.
- Measures individual and collective protection for victims, relatives, witnesses, and affected communities.
- Adequate funding and institutional resources to support redress and rehabilitation.
- Accessible means that inform victims and affected groups of their rights.

The above evaluation highlights that the adequacy and accessibility of such measures directly impact the legitimacy of the State's commitment to justice and the prevention of future abuses.

In the Global Torture Index, we refer to victims of torture and other ill-treatment following the definition of the [UN CAT General Comment No3](#), but also recognise that many victims are also survivors: *'Victims are persons who have individually or collectively suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that constitute violations of the Convention. A person should be considered a victim regardless of whether the perpetrator of the violation is identified, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted, and regardless of any familial or other relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. The term 'victim' also includes affected immediate family or dependants of the victim as well as persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims or to prevent victimisation. The term 'survivors' may, in some cases, be preferred by persons who have suffered harm.'*²

Table of contents: Victims' rights

1. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND FUNDAMENTAL SAFEGUARDS

- 1.1. Legal Recognition of Victims of Torture and Ill-Treatment at the National Level
- 1.2. Judicial Remedies for Victims
- 1.3. Rehabilitation for Victims of Torture and Ill-Treatment
- 1.4. Safety of Victims, Relatives and Witnesses

2. ENSURING REDRESS

- 2.1. Victim's Restitution
- 2.2. Compensation Mechanisms
- 2.3. Reparation for Victims of Torture

3. REHABILITATION

- 3.1. Access to Rehabilitation Programmes and Services for Victims of Torture
- 3.2. Freedom from Reprisals in Victim Rehabilitation

4. STATISTICAL DATA

² UN CAT GC 3, art. 3 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Protection For All

What do we measure in this section?

International human rights law establishes that states must do more than simply refrain from violating rights—they have a positive obligation to actively ensure the enjoyment of human rights within their jurisdiction. This includes not only enacting appropriate laws and regulations but also effectively implementing them. In *Velásquez Rodríguez*, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights emphasised the state's duty to exercise 'due diligence' in protecting individuals from abuses, including those by non-state actors. This includes the adoption of legislation affording effective protection and ensuring the criminal and civil accountability of non-state actors responsible for torture, as well as providing effective remedies for victims of torture by these actors.

Although anyone can be subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, depending on the context, culture and time, UN bodies have recognised that certain people or groups are especially vulnerable and require additional attention and protection. Hence, and for practical reasons, in this Index section, we include a limited number of groups in situations of the highest vulnerability, acknowledging that other groups may also face risks of ill-treatment. The selection is based on two main criteria: the existence of international and regional standards holding states accountable, and the widespread patterns of abuse these groups face. Some include children, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, ethnic and racial minorities, and people on the move. Situations that require special attention are those related to national security, such as counterterrorism or fighting extremism, and armed conflict, in which the exceptionalities introduced into the system often contribute to reducing safeguards to an extent that creates a void in which the risk of torture is heightened.

Table of contents: Protection for All

1. PROTECTION FOR ALL

- 1.1. General Provisions
- 1.2. Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls
 - 1.2.1. Intimate partner violence
 - 1.2.2. Femicides
 - 1.2.3. Domestic violence against children and other members of the family
 - 1.2.4. Violence against women's reproductive and sexual health
- 1.3. Violence Against Children
 - 1.3.1. Prevention measures
 - 1.3.2. Forms of torture and other ill-treatment
 - 1.3.3. International protection
- 1.4. Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTQIA+)
 - 1.4.1. Regulatory framework and implementation
 - 1.4.2. Forms of torture and ill-treatment
 - 1.4.3. International protection
- 1.5. Human Trafficking (optional section)
- 1.6. Indigenous Peoples (optional section)

2. EXCEPTIONAL CONTEXTS

- 2.1. National Security: Counterterrorism and Extremism
 - 2.1.1. Prevalence of torture in the context of national security
 - 2.1.2. Regulatory framework and implementation
 - 2.1.3. Fundamental safeguards
- 2.2. Armed Conflict (optional section)
 - 2.2.1. International commitment
 - 2.2.2. Torture and ill-treatment
 - 2.2.3. Accountability
 - 2.2.4. Special groups

Right To Defend and Civic Space

What do we measure in this section?

The right to defend human rights is a prerequisite for the eradication of torture. Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) play a crucial role in independently monitoring human rights violations, supporting victims, and holding states accountable—making civil society a key actor in the implementation of anti-torture commitments.

This section assesses the extent to which civil society organisations and individual HRDs are able, both in law and in practice, to operate freely and safely in a given country. This includes the presence of legislation and policies that foster an enabling environment, the ability to document human rights abuses without interference, freedom from undue restrictions, and meaningful, inclusive participation in decision-making processes.

In the Global Torture Index, we take the HRD definition of the [1998 UN Declaration of Human Rights Defenders](#), which sets forth in Art. 12 (3) that: *'Everyone is entitled, individually and in association with others, to be protected effectively under national law in reacting against or opposing, through peaceful means, activities and acts, including those by omission, attributable to States that result in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as acts of violence perpetrated by groups or individuals that affect the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.'*

Table of contents: Right to Defend and Civic Space

1. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- 1.1. Social and political context
- 1.2. Freedom of association and assembly
- 1.3. Freedom of expression
- 1.4. Right of access to information

2. HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING

- 2.1. During public assemblies
- 2.2. Engagement with international independent mechanisms

3. SERIOUS ATTACKS AGAINST HRDS AND PROTECTION MECHANISMS

- 3.1. Serious attacks against HRDs
- 3.2. Protection mechanisms



FURTHER RESOURCES

For further information, the complete 2025 Torture Index—including detailed data visualisations, FAQs, the methodology, and more—can be accessed on our website: <https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>. Should you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us at tortureindex@omct.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SUPPORT

This project is made possible through the generous support of our donors.

For a full list of contributors and partners, please visit:

<https://www.omct.org/en/global-torture-index>



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We invite you to explore the data and share your thoughts on social media using #GlobalTortureIndex. Join us in spreading awareness by engaging with the data and sharing your country's standing to drive meaningful conversation. Your participation is essential in raising awareness and fostering positive change.

CONNECT WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

