Query response on the Russian Federation: 1) Chechnya: situation of young Chechens growing up in the West without a network and knowledge of Chechen; 2) situation of young Chechens without a network and without knowledge of Russian (outside Chechnya); Treatment by authorities if they cannot find a job; 3) Chechnya: Forced recruitment to military / paramilitary / police or armed forces / units (not army); Mission abroad, activities, consequences of refusal [a-11151]

February 7, 2020

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We recommend that you look through the original materials. Original documents that are not free of charge or available online can be viewed or requested from ACCORD.

1) Chechnya: situation of young Chechens growing up in the West without a network and knowledge of Chechen

An expert in Chechnya, whose knowledge is based on field research in the North Caucasus, wrote the following in an email message dated January 23, 2020:

“There are no such people in Chechnya. I think it is wrong to assume that growing up abroad leads to poor Chechen knowledge. If people grow up as part of their family, they usually speak the language well enough to be able to live in their home country. Without family networks, Chechnya, whose social structure is extremely tribal, is in a fix.”(Chechen expert, January 23, 2020)
Independent analyst Neil Hauer, whose focus is Russia, the Caucasus, and Syria, wrote in an email on January 28, 2020 that there were very few people to whom this description applied, if any. The extended family networks are very large and dense and it is very difficult to imagine someone who has no relatives left in the Chechen Republic. Poor knowledge of Chechen would not make you stand out among the younger generation, since losing your mother tongue is a real problem. (Hauer, January 28, 2020)

According to Caucasian Knot, the people described in the request could find work and accommodation in Chechnya, but it would be more difficult and more expensive for them. In addition, the lack of Chechen knowledge and the length of their stay outside the region would raise questions. Many who had lived in Europe would be subjected to additional checks and suspected of being connected to the insurgents. (Caucasian Knot, January 28, 2020)

Jean-Francois Ratelle, a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa and an expert on Chechen extremism, writes in an email message dated February 5, 2020 that the people described in the question would have trouble if they went back to Chechnya and themselves wanted to integrate into local society, they should not have access to existing clan-based networks and should not speak Chechen. (Ratelle, February 5, 2020)

The following is information on the general socio-economic situation in Chechnya:

In a decision text of the Federal Administrative Court (BVwG) from October 2019, the following is stated:

“The North Caucasian republics stand out among the federal subjects of Russia because of their above-average level of impoverishment and dependence on the federal budget. The budgets of Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya are still over 80% financed by Moscow (GIZ 8.2019a, see ÖB Moscow 12.2018), although the federal target programs for the region have now expired. The situation in the North Caucasus has nevertheless improved, although it seems premature to speak of sustainable stabilization. The economic situation in Chechnya in particular has stabilized somewhat in recent years due to massive transfer payments from the federal budget. Although federal transfer payments remain important,

The average monthly wage in Chechnya in June 2019 was 27,443 rubles [approx. 388 euros] (Chechenstat 2019), nationwide at 48,453 rubles [approx. 686 euros] in the second quarter of 2019 (GKS 16.8.2019). The average pension amount in Chechnya in August 2019 was 12,440 rubles [approx. 176 euros] (Chechenstat 2019), nationwide in the first half of 2019 at 14,135 rubles [approx. 200 euros] (GKS 30.7.2019). The average subsistence level in Chechnya for the first quarter of 2019 for the working population was 10,967 rubles [approx. 155 euros], for pensioners at 8,553 rubles [approx. 121 euros] and for children at 10,552 rubles [approx. 150 euros].
Corruption is still widespread and large parts of the economy are controlled by a few families who are closely connected to the political system. There are credible reports that public officials have to pay part of their salary to the charity fund named after Kadyrov's father and run by his widow. The fund, founded in 2004, builds mosques and pursues charity projects. However, critics believe that the fund also serves the personal enrichment of Kadyrov and his related groups. The Russian daily Kommersant described the fund as one of the most non-transparent NGOs in the country (ÖB Moscow 12.2018).

The material living conditions for the majority of the Chechen population have improved significantly since the end of the Chechen war thanks to large grants from the Russian federal budget. The formerly destroyed capital of Chechnya, Grozny, has been rebuilt. However, unemployment and the resulting poverty and lack of prospects for parts of the population remain problematic. The population pyramid is similar to that of a classic developing country with high birth rates and a low average age, and is therefore very different from the overall Russian age structure (AA February 13, 2019).

[...]

Regarding the general situation of returnees, especially in the North Caucasus, it can be said that they face economic and social challenges above all. This affects above all the major economic problems compared to the rest of Russia and the associated unemployment in the North Caucasus. In addition, there are bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining documents, which can often only be overcome with the help of bribes.

The economic and social challenges affect large parts of the Russian population and can therefore not be described as a specific problem for returnees. Women from the North Caucasus face particular challenges, and civil society initiatives are helping to tackle them. A general statement about the risk situation of returnees with regard to possible political persecution by the Russian or the North Caucasian authorities cannot be made, as this depends very much on the individual case. It was learned from well-informed circles with a direct practical relevance that returnees are usually not confronted with discrimination on the part of the authorities (ÖB Moscow 12.2018). “(BVwG, October 24 , 2019)

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO), an agency of the European Union to promote practical cooperation between member states in the asylum area, published a report on the situation of the Chechens in Russia in August 2018. With reference to a source from 2016, it contains the following information:

“According to a representative of the International Crisis Group, many people in Chechnya are employed in the informal sector, and many only find work in other regions, such as B. in Moscow or on oil fields, and then send money home. ”(EASO, August 2018, p. 12)
In May 2019, the independent media platform openDemocracy will publish an interview with Irina Kosterina, a sociologist and coordinator of a 2016 study by the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Free Happy People International Center on the situation of men in the North Caucasus. According to Kosterina, the main concerns of men and women in the North Caucasus are everyday problems: unemployment, low incomes and the lack of opportunities for professional development due to the small labor market. Men and women are equally affected by concerns about money. Nevertheless, the main point for men is still the lack of work or stereotypes about which jobs are worthy enough for a man. These ideas would severely limit men's choices:

"Women and men have very similar ideas of what the main problems are in the [North Caucasus] republics. People were basically concerned with the day-to-day problems in their lives - unemployment, low incomes and an absence of opportunities for professional growth because of the small job market.

Money worries were of equal concern to men and women. People also talked about corruption, a sense of injustice and the clan system. [...] But still the main point is lack of work or the stereotypes about what jobs are dignified for a man in the North Caucasus to have. These ideas strongly limit men's possible choices, and hit the reputation of the breadwinner hard. " (openDemocracy, May 2, 2019)

You can find the entire study at the following link:


Caucasian Knot reports in February 2020 that unemployment figures for the North Caucasus published by the Russian statistics agency Rosstat are not trustworthy, according to Natalja Subarewitsch, a professor at Moscow State University and an expert on regional socio-economic development. The Rosstat figures, which would mean a record low unemployment rate in Ingushetia and Chechnya, would not take into account informal employment, which is very high in the North Caucasus, said the professor. According to Rosstat, the unemployment rate in Chechnya was 13.6 percent as of December 2019. According to Subarevich, there are no adequate socio-economic indicators for the North Caucasus because the weight of the shadow economy in the region is too great. In the North Caucasus, the proportion was between 40 and 60 percent:

"The data of the 'Rosstat' (Russian Federal Statistics Service) on the record low unemployment in Ingushetia and Chechnya should not be trusted, as it fails to take into account the informal employment, Professor Natalia Zubarevich has noted.

The 'Caucasian Knot' has reported that as of December 2019, Ingushetia, Chechnya, North Ossetia and Dagestan took the last four places in the population employment rating compiled by the 'Rosstat'. According to the rating, the unemployment rate in Ingushetia was 26.3%, in Chechnya and North Ossetia - 13.6% and 13.4%, respectively, and in Dagestan - 13%.
The 'Rosstat' rating disregards the informal employment, which is very high in Northern Caucasus, says Natalia Zubarevich, Professor at the Moscow State University and an expert in regional socioeconomic development.

In the opinion of Ms Zubarevich, no adequate socioeconomic indicators of the situation in the Caucasus exist - the weight of shadow economy is too high in its regions.

She has added that the last time the 'Rosstat' made a study of informal employment back in 2017; it showed that in Northern Caucasus this indicator was from 40% to 60%, while on the average in Russia it was 20%. “(Caucasian Knot, February 1, 2020)

2) situation of young Chechens without a network and without knowledge of Russian (outside Chechnya); Treatment by authorities if they cannot find a job

The Chechnya expert, cited above, wrote the following in his email information dated January 23, 2020:

“As in Europe, the chances on the job market are very poor with a lack of language skills. In contrast to the Soviet era, the authorities do not force anyone into gainful employment today.” (Chechen expert, January 23, 2020)

Upon request, the expert added on January 24, 2020:

“ In the rest of the Russian Federation, family networks are not necessary to be successful. Rather, professional qualifications are important there ”(Chechnya expert, January 24, 2020)

Neil Hauer wrote in his email on 28 January 2020 that the situation as a whole was very complicated due to racist attitudes and treatment by the authorities and society. Chechnya experiences in Moscow and other cities vary widely, with some of them thriving outside the Chechen Republic. (Hauer, January 28, 2020)

Jean-Francois Ratelle writes in his email report dated 5 February 2020 that the people described in the request could find job opportunities in other regions of the Russian Federation, but that they could potentially be victims of discrimination, which is no longer as bad as it was ten to 15 years ago, but is still regular. There are job opportunities, but Chechens, North Caucasians and Central Asia often have to choose to take unofficial jobs and live on construction sites in difficult conditions. If the people were unable to find a job, it could have consequences from the authorities in that they could have problems registering in a larger city and being harassed by local security forces. (Ratelle, February 5, 2020)

General information on the situation of Chechens in the Russian Federation can also be found in the following ACCORD query response from January 31, 2020:
ACCORD - Austrian Center for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation: Query response on the Russian Federation: 1) situation of former resistance fighters and their family members when returning to Chechnya or Russia; 2) Situation of Chechens in the Russian Federation: access to the housing market, labor market, health care, education, discrimination, January 31, 2019 (copy attached)

3) Chechnya: Forced recruitment to military / paramilitary / police or armed forces / units (not army); Foreign assignment, activities, consequences of a refusal

Russian Analytical Digest No. 238 of the Research Center for Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen in July 2019 contains a contribution by the North Caucasian expert Yekaterina Sokirjanskaja from the Conflict Analysis and Prevention Center. According to him, Ramzan Kadyrov repeatedly described himself as "Vladimir Putin's foot soldier", who was already fighting whenever the commander-in-chief of the army ordered it. In February 2014, Ramzan Kadyrov gathered 20,000 armed Chechen police officers in a stadium and said that tens of thousands of them had special training. Please ask the army commander-in-chief to see her as his voluntary special unit. They are ready to protect Russia, stability and borders and to take on tasks of any difficulty. On the same day, 10,000 security officers submitted written statements expressing their desire to be dispatched to any part of the world by order of the President. Since this oath of allegiance in 2014, Kadyrov's men have indeed been deployed outside Russia during the armed escalation in Donbass, Ukraine. Since Russia has denied the involvement of its security forces in Ukraine, Kadyrov has distanced itself from admitting the formal stationing of its men there and insisted that these fighters are volunteers and not soldiers. Kadyrov had therefore done a valuable service to the Kremlin by instructing his men to do the work that the official Russian security forces could not have done. The Kremlin officially deployed the Chechen security forces at the end of 2016, when the first Chechen military police battalion was sent to Syria. Another battalion was sent to Aleppo shortly afterwards. Since then, the Chechen military police have played an important role in Syria. According to Kadyrov, his men were entrusted with guarding the most important sites, law enforcement, patrols and accompanying humanitarian goods transports in the most important areas and most complicated districts. Some sources from Syrian civil society have testified that Chechen police officers played a greater role in moving the population from East Ghouta to Idlib: when the first battalion of the Chechen military police was sent to Syria. Another battalion was sent to Aleppo shortly afterwards. Since then, the Chechen military police have played an important role in Syria. According to Kadyrov, his men were entrusted with guarding the most important sites, law enforcement, patrols and accompanying humanitarian goods transports in the most important areas and most complicated districts. Some sources from Syrian civil society have testified that Chechen police officers played a greater role in moving the population from East Ghouta to Idlib: when the first battalion of the Chechen military police was sent to Syria. Another battalion was sent to Aleppo shortly afterwards. Since then, the Chechen military police have played an important role in Syria. According to Kadyrov, his men were entrusted with guarding the most important sites, law enforcement, patrols and accompanying humanitarian goods transports in the most important areas and most complicated districts. Some sources from Syrian civil society have testified that Chechen police officers played a greater role in moving the population from East Ghouta to Idlib: Another battalion was sent to Aleppo shortly afterwards. Since then, the Chechen military police have played an important role in Syria. According to Kadyrov, his men were entrusted with guarding the most important sites, law enforcement, patrols and accompanying humanitarian goods transports in the most important areas and most complicated districts. Some sources from Syrian civil society have testified that Chechen police officers played a greater role in moving the population from East Ghouta to Idlib: Another battalion was sent to Aleppo shortly afterwards.
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"Kadyrov has also repeatedly called himself the foot soldier of Vladimir Putin, ready to fight whenever necessary on the order of the General commander-in-arms. In February 2014, he gathered a stadium with 20,000 armed Chechen police and declared, 'We are tens of thousands who have had special training. We ask our national leader to consider us a voluntary special unit of the commander-in-chief. We are ready to protect Russia, its stability and borders and carry out tasks of any difficulty.' The same day 10,000 security servicemen submitted written reports expressing their wish to be sent to any part of the world upon the order of the president.

Since that pledge in 2014, Ramzan Kadyrov's men have been indeed used outside Russian borders during the armed escalation in the Ukrainian Donbass. Given that Russia denied the involvement of its security forces in Ukraine, Kadyrov distanced himself from admitting the formal deployment of his men there, insisting that these fighters were volunteers rather than servicemen. Thus, he provided a valuable service to the Kremlin, ordering his men to do the job that the Russian official security services could not afford to do.

The Kremlin officially used the Chechen security services at the end of December 2016 when the first Chechen battalion of military police was sent to Syria, followed by another battalion sent to Aleppo soon after. Since then the Chechen military police has played an important role in Syria where Russia needed a Sunni actor to balance its Shiite-Alevite alliance and to deploy a well-trained police force without much public opposition or resistance.

In Kadyrov's own words, 'our guys serving in the military police have been entrusted with guarding the most important sites, [providing] law-enforcement, patrol and accompanying humanitarian cargoes in the most important areas and complicated districts... the city of Palmira and the adjacent area are under full control of fighters from the Chechen Republic, as well as all the key strongholds in Syria.' Sources among Syrian civil society actors testified that Chechen police played a major role during the process of relocating the population from Eastern Ghouta to Idlib. In addition, Kadyrov's charity fund has undertaken the restoration of the historical mosques in Aleppo and Holms, something that Christian Russia - which had heavily bombed the country - would have never had the legitimacy to do. "(Research Center Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen, July 22, 2019, pp. 5-6)

The Chechnya expert, cited above, wrote the following in his email information dated January 23, 2020:
"No, I don't know anything about that. This would also make no sense, since there would be a risk of bringing disloyal people into military structures whose apparatus the political class is currently using to maintain power." (Chechnya expert, January 23, 2020)

Neil Hauer writes in his email information from 28 January 2020 that it is difficult to answer this question. But he had heard stories that those who were assigned to the military police battalions stationed in Syria were those who were considered "unreliable" or whose loyalty was seen as "fluctuating". The stationing in Syria is a way for them to show their loyalty. He, Hauer, was not sure whether this would go as far as compulsory recruitment of such people from the population. For those who are already with the security forces, the refusal to be stationed in Syria is guaranteed to result in a loss of job and probably also in the future that you will no longer get a government job, which is very unfavorable ("damaging"), because the government provides most of the job opportunities in Chechnya. (Hauer, 28. January 2020)

According to Caucasian Knot, people in Chechnya are being recruited for military / paramilitary / police or armed forces / units, and the compulsion is questionable. The concept of "voluntarily forced" has existed since the Soviet era. There are certainly many who agree to go to Syria, but there are no precise details. There was information about the use of pressure and layoffs of people who did not want to drive, but these were isolated. (Caucasian Knot, February 5, 2020)

Jean-Francois Ratelle wrote in his e-mail on February 5, 2020 that local residents of Chechnya would discuss stories about forced recruitment, but that no cases were documented legally reliable. It was possible, and if someone refused to accept deployment abroad, he could be targeted by the Chechen security forces. A station in Syria is not very common, which is why it is not something that every young man in Chechnya faces. But a person as described in the request, without a network and job, is at greater risk than others. (Ratelle, February 5, 2020)

The online newspaper Medusa, which is based in Riga and publishes in Russian and English, reports in December 2016 on the fate of Chechens in Brest (Belarus) who are trying to flee Russia and publishes the stories of some of them. A person named Ibragim said he was in danger. He received a summons, but did not go. They would have taken him away at night, shocked him, hit him, and pulled a plastic bag over his head. He was held for ten days. He was told to sign documents and work for them. Then he was released and he went to Brest. He was a supporter of Ichkeria in the first and second Chechen wars. Then he was amnestied. But always, if anything happened in Chechnya, he would be beaten up. Show him photos and ask him what that is, although he doesn't know that. You want him to work for you. He had been told that if he signed a contract he would have a salary of 100,000 rubles, a house, a car, and the go-ahead everywhere. But if he became a member of the Kadyrowzy, he would have to harm people. You get told what to do, and if they said you should kill someone, you would have to do it. But if he does something bad, you will take revenge on his children, even if he himself dies, because of the blood revenge. He knew that as soon as they signed a contract, some were sent to Ukraine and Syria. You would say on TV that they were volunteers, an army of hundreds of thousands. But they would beat people up and force them to sign a contract. Whoever came under them would take them
with them. You could be gone the next moment. Some would go away. You get told that a person went to Syria or the mountains (to the rebels, note ACCORD). After two to three months, the person is then found dead, with a beard that has grown long since. Someone had done something shortly beforehand, and then they drove to a mosque at five in the morning, taking all the youngsters with them and questioning them. Her superiors would tell them there had to be results, and they didn't care how they were achieved. They could put guns on you, or drugs. Main thing, there is a result. In Chechnya you live normally if you have a relative who is a superior, a minister or the head of the administration of a Rajon. Then you will not be touched. If you are taken away, then help one of the relatives. If you have no one to turn to, then you live badly in Chechnya:

"Ибрагим

Можно не рассказывать, почему я уехал? Мне угрожает опасность, вот и приехал сюда... Мне пришла повестка, но я не пошел в отделение. Тогда ночью меня забрали, били током, избивали, голову в пакете держали. Десять дней я там был, говорили, чтобы я подписал документы и работал на них. Потом выпустили, и мы уехали сюда.

В первую and вторую войну я был ичкерийцем, потом меня амнистировали. Но потом - как что происходит [в Чечне], так меня избивают. Показывают фотографии and спрашивают, что это, где это, хотя я не знаю. Они хотели, чтобы я на них работал. Говорили, что если я соглашусь, подпишу контракт, то у меня будет 100 тысяч зарплата, дом, машиде, 

Но если я стану кадыровцем, то мне надо будет людей обижать. Они же говорят, что делать надо, и если говорят, что надо убить человека, то надо убивать. А ведь если я что-то плохое сделаю, то моим детям будут мстить, даже если я погибну. Кровная месть.

Знаю, что некоторых отправляли на Украину и в Сирию, как только они подписали контракт. Они по телевизору говорят, что у них добровольцы, стотысячная армия, но они избивают и насильно застав

Вообще кто им попадется, тех и забирают. Вот идешь ты - а вот тебя уже нету. Некоторые люди исчезают. Тебе говорят, что в Сирию уехал или в горы ушел, а через два-три месяца его находят убитым, с от Недавно в Грозном кто-то что-то сделал, они к мечети пришли в пять утра и всех молодых забрали

Им начальство говорит, что нужен результат, и им нет разницы [как его достичь]. Они могут оружие подбросить, наркотики. Лишь бы был результат.

В Чечне живешь нормально, если у тебя родственник - начальник, министр, глава администрации района. Тогда тебя не трогают, а если все-таки забирают, то они тебе помогают. А если тебе не к кому обратиться, то ты плохо живешь. "(Medusa, December 6, 2016)

Open Caucasus Media (OC Media), an independent news portal reporting on the North and South Caucasus, writes in an article in August 2019 about the case of a Chechen named Nurmagomed and its possible deportation to Chechnya. According to the article, deportation could lead to several scenarios, one possible being that Nurmagomed be released. The Russian authorities, unlike the European governments, could conclude that the terrorist suspect had not committed a crime.

Chechnya might also have no interest in condemning him. It could be much more beneficial for the authorities to force Nurmagomed to join Ramzan Kadyrov's security forces ("make Nurmagomed join Kadyrov's security services"). There have been cases in which people were forced to fight in Syria or Ukraine. A "broken" refugee who sees no other way out could also choose to cooperate with the regime. Paradoxically, someone accused of fighting in Syria could end up being deported to Syria:

"Do we even know where we send terrorism suspects to? Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechnya is a place of mass executions, murders, abductions, disappearances, rape, torture, intimidation, extortion, fabricated criminal cases, and monstrous corruption. Chechnya operates outside of Russia's legal system - with Russia's approval.

There is more than one scenario here. [...]"

However, another scenario is also possible - Nurmagomed could be released.

Russian authorities might disagree with the European governments and rule that the terrorist suspect didn't commit any crime. Chechnya might also not be interested in convicting him. It could be much more beneficial for the authorities to make Nurmagomed join Kadyrov's security services. There have been cases of people forced to fight in Syria or in Ukraine. A 'broken' refugee, seeing no other way out, might as well just go for cooperation with the regime.

Paradoxically, someone who is accused of fighting in Syria can end up in Syria by being deported. "(OC Media, August 8, 2019)

For information on this question, please also refer to the following ACCORD response from August 2018:


Sources: (Access to all sources on February 7, 2020)

· ACCORD - Austrian Center for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation: Query response on the Russian Federation: 1) situation of former resistance fighters and their family members when returning to Chechnya or Russia; 2) Situation of Chechens in the Russian Federation: access to the housing market, labor market, health care, education, discrimination, January 31, 2019 (copy attached)


· Caucasian Knot: conversation about messaging app, 28 January 2020


· Caucasian Knot: conversation about messaging app, 5th February 2020


· Research Center Eastern Europe at the University of Bremen: Russian Analytical Digest No. 238, July 22, 2019 https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD238.pdf (https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD238.pdf)

· Hauer, Neil: E-mail information 28 January 2020


· Medusa: вернетесь Когда, мы вас убьем »Илья Азар - о том, как сотни чеченцев пытаются убежать в Европу через Брест [ If you for u ckkommt, bring us to you to. Ilya Asar on how hundreds of Chechens try to flee to Europe via Brest ], December 6, 2016 https://meduza.io/feature/2016/12/06/kogda-vernetes-my-vas-ubiem (https://meduza.io/feature/2016/12/06/kogda-vernetes-my-vas-ubiem)
· OC Media: A Chechen refugee Poland wants to give up to Russia, 8th August 2019 https://oc-media.org/a-chechen-refugee-poland-wants-to-give-up-to-russia/ (https://oc-media.org/a-chechen-refugee-poland-wants-to-give-up-to-russia/)


· Ratelle, Jean-Francois: E-mail information, 5th February 2020

· Chechnya Expert: E-mail information 23 January 2020

· Chechnya Expert: E-mail information 24 January 2020

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Query response on the situation of young Chechens

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