

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	735
Land:	Rusland
Kilde:	EUAA
Titel:	COI Query. Response. Major developments in the Russian Federation in relation to political opposition and military service
Udgivet:	17. februar 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. juni 2023

COI QUERY

Country of Origin

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Title

Major developments in the Russian Federation in relation to political opposition and military service

Reference period

1 November 2022 to 16 February 2023

Topic(s)

1. General developments

2. Legislative developments in relation to political dissent and opposition and their implementation in practice

3. Legislative developments related to military service in Russia and their implementation in practice

4. Military recruitment in Chechnya

5. Treatment of deserters and servicemen refusing deployment to Ukraine

Date of completion

17 February 2023

Query Code

Q37-2023

Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)

France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Unit (DIDR)

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – The Russian Federation

Major developments in the Russian Federation in relation to political opposition and military service

1. General developments

During the invasion of Ukraine, which started on 24 February 2022, the Russian military forces conducted excessive shelling of civilian infrastructure¹ and committed numerous atrocities toward civilians,² including killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, and enforced disappearances of Ukrainian civilians³ as well as forced deportations of the civilian population to Russia and

¹ Euronews, Russian forces launch new wave of strikes on civilian infrastructure, 6 December 2022 [url](#); RFE/RL, Russia Strikes Ukrainian Infrastructure Again As UN Warns Of Serious Humanitarian Crisis, 15 December 2022, [url](#)

² EP, Ukraine war: MEPs push for special tribunal to punish Russian crimes, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

³ HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

Russia-occupied territories in Ukraine.⁴ According to UN OHCHR, 7 199 Ukrainian civilians were killed and 11 756 injured from 24 February to 13 February 2023.⁵

In November 2022, a top Ukrainian children's rights official said that nearly 10 800 Ukrainian children 'had been reported by relatives, family or friends to have been deported to Russia without their parents.'⁶ In January 2023, Ukrainian officials stated that almost 14 000 children were "deported" to Russia from occupied parts of Ukraine. At the end of the same month, the head of UNCHR Filippo Grandi accused Russia of 'violating "fundamental" children protection principles by giving Russian passports to unaccompanied child refugees' and putting them up for adoption, without specifying how many children might have been affected.⁷ In May 2022, President Putin signed a decree to make the procedure of adoption of Ukrainian children in Russia easier.⁸

On 30 September 2022, President Putin signed 'accession treaties' to formally annex Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions,⁹ following which the Russian Constitution was amended to incorporate these occupied territories.¹⁰ On November 2022, the head of the main migration department of the Russian Ministry of Interior stated that more than 80 000 residents of the abovementioned territories received Russian passports since the annexation.¹¹

On 13 December 2022, the Russian State Duma adopted a draft law to impose the use of the Russian Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure in the Russia-occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions. The bill envisages legal immunity for crimes, which were committed to 'defend the interests' of Russia before the annexation of these territories.¹² While the bill gives no further explanations about the types of criminal offences it would cover, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch believed that these would refer to war crimes committed by the Russian forces and their proxies in the occupied areas.¹³ The

⁴ HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2023, [url](#); HRW, "We had no choice" – Filtration and the Crime of Forcibly Transferring Ukrainian Civilians to Russia, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵ UN OHCHR, Ukraine: civilian casualty update, 13 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶ Washington Post (The), Ukrainians struggle to find and reclaim children taken by Russia, 24 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷ BBC News, Ukraine War: UN accused Russia of breaking child protection rules over refugees, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸ Washington Post (The), Ukrainians struggle to find and reclaim children taken by Russia, 24 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹ Guardian (The), Putin annexes four regions of Ukraine in major escalation of Russia's war, 30 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰ Meduza, Putin amends Russian Constitution, orders the appropriation of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, 5 October 2022, [url](#)

¹¹ Izvestia, Свыше 80 тыс. жителей новых регионов РФ получили российские паспорта [Over 80 thousand residents of the new regions of Russia received Russian passports], 24 November 2022, [url](#)

¹² Meduza, State Duma proposes waiving punishment for crimes committed 'in Russia's interests' on occupied Ukrainian territory, 14 December 2022, [url](#); AI, Russia: Proposed bill that removes criminal liability for war crimes is 'impunity made law', 16 December 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: 'Immunity Law' Set for Crimes in Ukraine, 20 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³ AI, Russia: Proposed bill that removes criminal liability for war crimes is 'impunity made law', 16 December 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: 'Immunity Law' Set for Crimes in Ukraine, 20 December 2023, [url](#)

bill needs to pass second and third reading in the State Duma, after which it has to be adopted by the Federal Council and signed by the president.¹⁴

In March 2022, Russia was excluded from the Council of Europe (CoE),¹⁵ which eliminated any formal obligation for the Russian authorities to commit to democratic values¹⁶ and raised questions over the future of a moratorium on the death penalty, adopted as a condition for Russia's membership in the CoE in 1996.¹⁷ In July 2022, media reported that the Russia-backed authorities of Donetsk announced the start of using the death penalty¹⁸ from 2025.¹⁹ At the beginning of November 2022, in response to pro-Ukrainian sabotage attacks, Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev stated via his Telegram channel that the death penalty moratorium in Russia could be lifted if necessary.²⁰

On 17 January 2023, President Putin submitted a draft bill to the State Duma to consider invalid with regards to Russia the Statute of the CoE, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, and 18 other international agreements due to the termination of Russia's membership in CoE.²¹

In its report on human rights practices for 2021, the United States Department of State (USDOS) noted that conditions of detention in prisons, penal colonies, and detention centers were 'often harsh and life threatening' with 'overcrowding, abuse by guards and inmates, limited access to health care, food shortages, and inadequate sanitation' being common.²² Media sources reported on the use of torture in prisons and detention centres²³ as well as on the attempts of the Russian authorities to cover up these instances.²⁴ OVD-Info reported that protesters detained during the protests in spring and autumn 2022 faced police violence while being in detention.²⁵

¹⁴ HRW, Russia: 'Immunity Law' Set for Crimes in Ukraine, 20 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵ CoE, Exclusion of the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe and suspension of all relations with Belarus, 17 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶ Davidis, S., Human rights in wartime: a look back at 2022, Riddle, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ Moscow Times (The), Russia Quits Europe's Rule of Law Body, Sparking Questions Over Death Penalty, 10 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸ RFE/RL, Russia-Backed Separatists In Ukraine Lift Moratorium On Death Penalty, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹ Reuters, Russia-backed separatists to start using death penalty from 2025, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁰ Moscow Times (The), Ex-President Medvedev Backs Death Penalty for Wartime Saboteurs, 3 November 2022, [url](#)

²¹ TASS, Putin proposes to denounce Statute of Council of Europe, conventions on human rights, 17 January 2023, [url](#)

²² USDOS, Russia 2021 Human Rights Report, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

²³ Civil Rights Defenders, Tortured to silence – Russia's war against its own people, 23 June 2022, [url](#); Geopolitical Monitor, Torture Methods in Russia's Prison Complex, 24 July 2023, [url](#); DW, Torture is rife in Russia's prisons, 1 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁴ DW, Torture is rife in Russia's prisons, 1 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁵ OVD-Info, Repressions in Russia in 2022, OVD-Info overview, n.d., [url](#)

2. Legislative developments in relation to political dissent and opposition and their implementation in practice

Since the start of the invasion in Ukraine the Russian authorities were reported to have been using the country's legal system to suppress political dissent, independent journalism, and anti-war activism.²⁶ Those who show dissent and opposition are being labelled 'foreign agents' and 'national traitors' while anti-war activists are facing prison sentences.²⁷ The legislation and judiciary system are used to punish reporting on or mentioning of Ukrainian casualties or war crimes committed by Russian military forces in Ukraine.²⁸ Punishments under many articles of the Criminal Code were reported to have become more severe, with court cases against opposition figures resulting in excessive prison sentences. Additionally, the use of terrorist charges against people opposing the authorities has also increased.²⁹

According to Net Freedoms Project (*Setevye svobody*), 779 cases of criminal prosecution for expressing an opinion online were initiated in 2022 while more than 1 000 journalists have left Russia to avoid criminal charges or to stay in the profession.³⁰ Teaching staff at state universities reported facing dismissals for expressing a critical opinion in social media and threats to be named 'foreign agents' by the university administration.³¹

2.1. “Foreign agents” law

On 1 December 2022, the law “On the control over activities carried out by persons under the foreign influence” came into force.³² The law broadens the grounds for the inclusion of individuals and legal entities into a register of foreign agents. To be included in the foreign agents register, one will no longer have to receive foreign funding but rather be considered “under foreign influence.”³³ The definition of “foreign influence” was defined as “providing support from a foreign source to a person and (or) influencing a person, including by coercion, persuasion and (or) in other ways.”³⁴

²⁶ HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2023, [url](#); Kolesnikov, A., How Russians Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the War, Foreign Affairs, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

²⁷ Kolesnikov, A., How Russians Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the War, Foreign Affairs, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

²⁸ HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁹ Davidis, S., Human rights in wartime: a look back at 2022, Riddle, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁰ Perild, Internet freedom report published in Russia: more than 637,000 website blockings and 779 criminal cases per year, 2 February 2023, [url](#); Setevye Svobody, 2022: Dva Runeta [2022: Two Runets], n.d., [url](#), p. 2

³¹ Meduza, «Раз сильно умный, в государственном учреждении работать не будешь» [“If you're so smart, you won't work in a government institution”], 23 January 2023, [url](#)

³² Mediazona, “Foreign agents” everywhere. New rules for labelling persons and organisations enacted in Russia, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

³³ ICNL, Russia, 27 August 2022, [url](#); Richter, A., “Foreign Agent Media” List Expanded, IRIS Legal Observations of the European Audiovisual Observatory, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁴ ICNL, Russia, 27 August 2022, [url](#)

After the start of the invasion in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Russian authorities labelled public figures – including opposition politicians, musicians, and bloggers – as “foreign agents.”³⁵ The initial list of “foreign agent media” which comprised 10 outlets, most of which were affiliated with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America, in 2017-2020, increased to 54 names by November 2022. The number of persons with the status of “foreign agent media” grew from 5 in 2020 to 76 at the beginning of the invasion in Ukraine and to 135 by November 2022. Additionally, 21 journalists were included on a general list of “foreign agents.”³⁶

As reported by an independent media outlet Verstka, 38 of 209 persons designated as “foreign agents” were under criminal prosecution as of 2 December 2022. According to the source, 28 of them were wanted and two were in pre-trial detention. The most frequently cited charge was spreading deliberately false information about the Russian army forces.³⁷ On 25 November 2022, a prominent lawyer Ilya Novikov, who resides in Kyiv since 2021,³⁸ has harshly criticised Russia’s invasion of Ukraine³⁹ and joined the Ukrainian territorial defense forces⁴⁰ was designated as a “foreign agent;”⁴¹ on 1 December 2022, he was put to the federal wanted list on unspecified charges.⁴²

On 7 February 2023, the Investigative Committee of Tver region initiated a first criminal case under the article of the Criminal Code on non-compliance with the ‘foreign agents’ law against an activist of “Golos” movement,⁴³ established to defend the rights of voters.⁴⁴

2.2. Dissemination of false information about Russian Armed Forces

On 23 January 2023, Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov stated that 187 offences under Article 207.3 on the dissemination of knowingly false information about Russian military forces and Russian state institutions were recorded in 2022. According to the source, investigations into 78 criminal incidents, which were committed by 67 people, were concluded and the cases

³⁵ HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁶ Richter, A., “Foreign Agent Media” List Expanded, IRIS Legal Observations of the European Audiovisual Observatory, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁷ Verstka, Telegram, 2 December 2022, [url](#); Radio Svoboda, “Вёрстка”: на 18% иноагентов в России заведены уголовные дела [“Verstka” 18% of foreign agents in Russia are under criminal prosecution], 2 December 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ Meduza, Russian authorities add former Memorial lawyer Ilya Novikov to federal wanted list, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

³⁹ RFE/RL, Russian Interior Ministry Adds Noted Lawyer Ilya Novikov To Its Wanted List, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Verstka, Telegram, 30 November 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹ Novaya Gazeta Europe, Russia’s Justice Ministry adds politician Yevgeny Roizman, lawyer Ilya Novikov, and TV Rain host Anna Mongayt to ‘foreign agents’ list, 25 November 2022, [url](#)

⁴² RFE/RL, Russian Interior Ministry Adds Noted Lawyer Ilya Novikov To Its Wanted List, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴³ Perild, The first criminal case was opened in Russia due to “failure to fulfill the duties of a foreign agent”, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Golos, webpage, n.d., [url](#)

were brought before the courts.⁴⁵ As noted by HRW, nearly half of the criminal cases initiated until October 2022 under Article 207.3 were against journalists, bloggers, or activists.⁴⁶

On 24 January 2023, the head of human rights organisation Agora Pavel Chikov noted 23 of 187 offences charged under Article 207.3 in 2022 were committed outside Russia.⁴⁷ The source also noted that courts started the practice of trials in absentia, which was not common before. At the end of 2022, courts received the cases against journalist Alexander Nevzorov, blogger Veronika Belotserkovskaya, and at least two other people.⁴⁸ On 27 January 2023, in a first court trial in absentia, a Moscow court sentenced a former police officer, who had left Russia several months before, to eight years in prison.⁴⁹ On 6 February 2023, a court in Moscow sentenced Belotserkovskaya in absentia to nine years in prison.⁵⁰

At the end of December 2022, the first criminal case under Article 207.3 was recorded in Dagestan. This case was initiated against Arslan Mirzaev, known as Ali Charinsky,⁵¹ a blogger and a representative of the Free Caucasus movement, who currently resides in Ukraine.⁵²

On 12 January 2022, a court in Abakan (Khakassia) extended by two months the detention of Mikhail Afanasyev, editor-in-chief of a local media source Novy Fokus,⁵³ who was detained in April 2022 because of his article about National Guard (Rosgvardia) members, who refused to fight in Ukraine.⁵⁴ The journalist faces up to 10 years in prison.⁵⁵ Another example of the extension of pre-trial detention is the case of a female activist, who was charged under Article 207.3 and faces up to 10 years in prison for replacing price tags in a supermarket with anti-war stickers.⁵⁶ On 7 February 2023, a court in Barnaul, Altay region, sentenced journalist Maria Ponomarenko, who was held in pre-trial detention since April 2022, to six years in the penal colony due to her post in Telegram about the Russian attack on the Mariupol theatre in Ukraine.⁵⁷

⁴⁵ Izvestia, «Прокуратура всё больше делает акцент на своей правозащитной функции» ["The prosecutor's office is increasingly emphasizing its human rights function"], 23 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶ HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 20 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹ RFE/RL, Russian Police Officer Gets Eight Years In Prison In Absentia Over Posts About War In Ukraine, 27 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰ OVD-Info, Суд в Москве заочно приговорил блогера Веронику Белоцерковскую к девяти годам колонии [A court in Moscow sentenced blogger Veronika Belotserkovskaya to nine years in absentia], 6 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵¹ Sprosite u Rasula, Telegram, 29 December 2022, [url](#)

⁵² Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

⁵³ Sibir.Realii, Хакасскому журналисту Афанасьеву продлили арест еще на два месяца [Arrest of a Khakassian journalist Afanasyev was extended for two more month], 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Guardian (The), 'I'm waiting to be arrested': Russian 'fake news' law targets journalists, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Sibir.Realii, Хакасскому журналисту Афанасьеву продлили арест еще на два месяца [Arrest of a Khakassian journalist Afanasyev was extended for two more month], 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Frontline, She Posted Anti-War Stickers in A Russian Grocery Store. She Now Faces Up to 10 Years in Prison, 1 November 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷ AI, Russia: Journalist Maria Ponomarenko sentenced to six years in penal colony over Ukraine bombing post, 15 February 2023, [url](#)

2.3. Human rights defenders

On 26 January 2023, the Moscow City Court upheld the application by the Russian Ministry of Justice to liquidate Moscow Helsinki Group,⁵⁸ the oldest human rights organisation in Russia, established in 1976.⁵⁹ The lawsuit against the organisation was based on such violations as the participation of its members in events outside of Moscow and therefore exceeding the organization's statutory limitations.⁶⁰ In January 2023, the Russian Federation's Investigative Committee initiated an investigation against the chairman of the International Memorial, Yan Rachinsky, on charges of rehabilitating Nazism, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison, due to his 2021 social media post.⁶¹

2.4. Developments in Chechnya

Under the leadership of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen authorities suppress harshly any dissent and opposition. HRW reported that in December 2022 Chechen security forces detained and subjected to ill-treatment dozens of family members of five exiled Chechen bloggers and activists, who were speaking out against Kadyrov's regime online. The families were forced to apologise and publicly distance themselves from their relatives.⁶²

In an interview with the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in October 2022, the editor-in-chief of Caucasian Knot, Gregory Shvedov, noted that the Chechen authorities were able to 'easily target a person outside the republic' which makes 'no place in Russia' safe for them.⁶³ On 16 February 2023, a former resident of Chechnya who was returning from his father's funerals in Chechnya to the Netherlands, where he had been granted asylum as 'an LGBTQ+ refugee', was reportedly detained by police in Moscow's Domodedovo airport and handed over to the Chechen law enforcement officers.⁶⁴

On 20 January 2023, a human rights defender Abubakar Yangulbaev offered in a video recording to exchange himself for his mother, Zarema Musayeva,⁶⁵ who was abducted by law

⁵⁸ AI, Russia: Court order to liquidate Moscow Helsinki Group human rights organization unlawful, 26 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹ Sever.Realii, Минюст подал иск о ликвидации Московской Хельсинской группы [The Ministry of Justice filed a lawsuit to liquidate the Moscow Helsinki Group], 20 December 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Rights in Russia, Reactions to Moscow City Court Judge Mikhail Kazakov's decision to dissolve the Moscow Helsinki Group, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹ Radio Svoboda, Главу "Мемориала" проверяют по статье о реабилитации нацизма [Head of "Memorial" is investigated under the article on rehabilitation of Nazism], 17 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶² HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

⁶³ DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 34

⁶⁴ Mediazona, LGBTQ+ refugee at risk of execution after returning to Russia to attend father's funeral. He was detained at Moscow airport and handed over to Chechen authorities, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Novaya Gazeta Europe, Abubakar Yangulbaev asks Chechnya's Kadyrov to be exchanged for his mother Zarema Musaeva, who spent last year under arrest, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

enforcement officers from her home in Nizhny Novgorod in January 2022 and transferred in Grozny,⁶⁶ where she stayed in detention on charges of using violence against a police officer. In January 2022, Kadyrov stated that Yangulbaev family was supporting extremism and terrorism and therefore they must be placed under detention.⁶⁷ According to HRW, Abubakar Yangulbaev is a supposed administrator of 1ADAT social media channel, which was one of the key targets of Kadyrov's regime.⁶⁸

3. Legislative developments related to military service in Russia and their implementation in practice

3.1. Conscription to obligatory military service, conditions of military service and use of conscripts in the fighting in Ukraine

The autumn conscription of 2022 was delayed by a month due to 'partial mobilisation,'⁶⁹ ordered by President Putin on 21 September 2022.⁷⁰ Military recruitment commissions started their work on 1 November. The deployment of the recruits from assembly points (*sborny punkt*) to military units began on 15 November.⁷¹ On 31 December, the autumn draft ended, with MoD reporting that 120 000 men were conscripted to obligatory one-year military service and sent to military units and military bodies.⁷²

In December 2022, the head of MoD Sergei Shoigu proposed changing the conscription age to 21 – 30 and stated that conscripts would be offered to sign a contract with the military instead of starting the obligatory one-year military service.⁷³ According to the chairman of the Russian parliament's defense committee, Andrei Kartapolov, as cited by Reuters, the increase of the upper age limit might be applied already during the spring draft of 2023. The lower age limit – from 18 to 21 – would be changed 'after a one-to-three year "transition period."' ⁷⁴ As noted by independent media outlet Meduza, the change of the conscription age would enable

⁶⁶ Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Urgent Statement on the abduction of Zarema Musaeva, 21 January 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷ Novaya Gazeta Europe, Abubakar Yangulbaev asks Chechnya's Kadyrov to be exchanged for his mother Zarema Musaeva, who spent last year under arrest, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸ HRW, Russian Federation – Events of 2022, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹ Moscow Times (The), In Photos: Russia's Autumn Round of Military Conscription Gets Underway , 29 November 2022, [url](#); Kommersant, Минобороны сообщило о завершении осеннего призыва [The Defense Ministry announced the end of the autumn draft], 31 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Guardian (The), Putin announces partial mobilisation and threatens nuclear retaliation in escalation of Ukraine war, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

⁷¹ Kommersant, Минобороны сообщило о завершении осеннего призыва [The Defense Ministry announced the end of the autumn draft], [url](#)

⁷² TASS, МО РФ сообщило о завершении осеннего призыва граждан на военную службу [MoD of RF announced the end of the autumn draft of citizens for military service], 31 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷³ Meduza, 'A diverse, broad process' Why the Kremlin wants to reform Russia's seasonal conscription and boost the army's numbers, and what it could mean for ordinary citizens, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Reuters, Russia could expand draft age as soon as this spring, lawmaker says, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

MoD to bolster its 'conscript resources' as many young men use their studies to get a deferral from military service.⁷⁵

Many young men use study deterrents and health-related exemptions to avoid military service.⁷⁶ In December 2022, military recruitment and police officers and police reportedly conducted large-scale arrests of men of conscription age,⁷⁷ often ignoring their right to a deferral from military service. Raids during which young men were delivered to a military recruitment office by the police and within one day transferred to military units – despite a legal requirement that a draft notice should be delivered no later than three days before the start of the military service⁷⁸ – were reported in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Volgograd, Vladivostok,⁷⁹ and other cities.⁸⁰ As noted by the head of the human rights group Citizen. Army. Law Sergei Krivenko, the raids to fulfill the autumn draft quota were of extensive character, and police officers used such means as tracking mobile phones and using subway surveillance cameras.⁸¹

According to the Russian legislation, people who were called for military service, including alternative civil service, are prohibited to leave the county until the end of their service.⁸²

In recent years it was reported that many conscripts were facing hazing (*dedovshchina*) – an 'everyday cycle of violence' in their military unit,⁸³ consisting of physical and psychological⁸⁴ violence by senior conscripts⁸⁵ and officers and extortion of money⁸⁶ – which was reported to

⁷⁵ Meduza, 'A diverse, broad process' Why the Kremlin wants to reform Russia's seasonal conscription and boost the army's numbers, and what it could mean for ordinary citizens, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶ AP, Russian military announces plan to expand, create new units, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁷ Current Time, "К розыску призывников в РФ подключились полицейские". Пробивают телефоны, смотрят камеры наружного наблюдения. Рассказывает правозащитник ["Police officers joined the search for conscripts in Russia." They search phones, watch surveillance cameras. The human rights activist explains], 17 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Meduza, 'If a person doesn't resist, they send him away' Russia's fall conscription campaign is wrapping up. Here are four stories about what it takes to avoid the draft, 31 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Meduza, 'A diverse, broad process' Why the Kremlin wants to reform Russia's seasonal conscription and boost the army's numbers, and what it could mean for ordinary citizens, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰ Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 13 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹ Current Time, "К розыску призывников в РФ подключились полицейские". Пробивают телефоны, смотрят камеры наружного наблюдения. Рассказывает правозащитник ["Police officers joined the search for conscripts in Russia." They search phones, watch surveillance cameras. The human rights activist explains], 17 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸² Konsultant Plyus, Почему может быть ограничен выезд за границу? [Why travelling abroad can be restricted?], 23 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸³ Getto, A., Hazing is still common and deadly in the Russian army, 29 September 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴ Guardian (The), Russian army's hazing culture drove son to kill soldiers, says father, 6 November 2019, [url](#); CNN, In Russia's military, a culture of brutality runs deep, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵ New York Times (The), Atrocities in Ukraine war have deep roots in Russian military, 19 April 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), Russian army's hazing culture drove son to kill soldiers, says father, 6 November 2019, [url](#); CNN, In Russia's military, a culture of brutality runs deep, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁶ Moscow Times (The), More Than a Decade After Military Reform, Hazing Still Plagues the Russian Army, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

have led to suicides, killings of fellow servicemen, and desertion.⁸⁷ In an email communication with ACCORD in October 2019, Sergei Krivenko noted that there were cases, in which violence in the Russian army was caused by ethnic sentiments. According to NGO Soldiers' Mothers of St Petersburg, similarly contacted by ACCORD, there was a risk of being taunted on ethnic or religious grounds but the actual occurrence would depend on a particular unit or its commanders. The source noted that much would depend also on conscripts' physical and personal characteristics.⁸⁸ No recent information on the traits, according to which a conscript would be at a higher risk of hazing while performing his military service, or reports that a person would be subjected to hazing due to his ethnicity or sexual orientation was found during the time constraints of this query.

3.1.1. Alternative civil service

In the interview with DIS in October 2022, Sergei Krivenko stated that many people applied for alternative civil service after the start of the 'partial' mobilisation.⁸⁹ According to the latest available statistics by the Federal Service of Labour and Employment (Rostrud), 1 166 young men were enrolled in alternative civil service as of 1 August 2022.⁹⁰ No statistics for the second part of 2022 or information on which basis the applications for alternative civil service were approved were found in the time constraints of this query.

Sources giving legal advice to future conscripts noted that it was difficult to substitute military service with alternative civil service. The application to a military recruitment office should be lodged no later than six months before the start of the draft. Thus, the postal date on the application should be no later than 1 October for someone who expects to be drafted in spring and no later than 1 April in case of the autumn draft.⁹¹ Some frequent reasons for refusals to grant alternative civil service reportedly included the expiration of the deadline to submit the application, insufficient substantiation of the reasons for applying to alternative civil service, false information given by the applicant, lack of available or suitable vacancies, evasion of military service in the past.⁹² Replacing military service with alternative civil service on the grounds of personal convictions was reported to be more difficult than on the grounds of religious beliefs. The religion of the conscript should be well-known and recognised, and

⁸⁷ Guardian (The), Russian army's hazing culture drove son to kill soldiers, says father, 6 November 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸ ACCORD, Russische Föderation: Wehrdienst und Dedovschchina [The Russian Federation: Military Service and Dedovshchina], 31 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁹ DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁰ Russia, Rostrud, 2022, n.d., [url](#)

⁹¹ Prizyva Net, Альтернативная служба [Alternative service], 19 January 2023, [url](#); Sluzhba pomoschi prizyvnikom, Альтернативная гражданская служба — 2023: условия и требования [Alternative civil service - 2023: conditions and requirements], 10 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹² Pravo Ru, Альтернативная гражданская служба: кому положена и как добиться [Alternative civilian service: who is entitled to it and how to achieve it], 10 November 2022, [url](#); Sluzhba pomoschi prizyvnikom, Альтернативная гражданская служба — 2023: условия и требования [Alternative civil service - 2023: conditions and requirements], 10 February 2023, [url](#)

religious affiliation should be proven with additional documents (certificate of membership, testimonies of other members) and the membership should be long-lasting.⁹³

Vacant positions that are allocated to conscripts performing alternative civil service are provided by public institutions working in the areas of social services, healthcare, education, and culture and art.⁹⁴ These institutions should be in subordination to federal or regional executive authorities or belong to the Russian Armed Forces (RAF).⁹⁵ The list of positions and professions available for alternative civil service and the list of organisations offering them is provided yearly by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection,⁹⁶ with the latest list being dated 17 March 2022.⁹⁷ The list of professions for alternative civil service in 2023 included more than 120 specialisations, consisting of both ‘working’ professions (cleaner, driver, mailman, courier, handyman, etc.) and in positions requiring special education (veterinarian, doctor, laboratory technician, engineer, programmer, etc.).⁹⁸ However, most positions offered in reality reportedly did not require special qualifications and involved physical labour; the likelihood of getting into a position requiring certain qualifications was ‘extremely small.’⁹⁹ There is no possibility to choose a profession for performing alternative civil service.¹⁰⁰

On 15 November 2022, the Federal Law on Mobilisation Preparations and Mobilisation was amended with Article 17.1,¹⁰¹ according to which, as summarized by Novaya Gazeta Europe, conscripts who perform alternative civil service ‘in organisations subordinate to executive authorities or local governments can be sent to serve in positions of civilian personnel of Russia’s army, other troops, military formations, bodies and special forces during the period of mobilisation.’¹⁰²

⁹³ Prizyva Net, Альтернативная служба [Alternative service], 19 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Sluzhba pomoschi prizyvnikam, Альтернативная гражданская служба — 2023: условия и требования [Alternative civil service - 2023: conditions and requirements], 10 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Pravo Ru, Альтернативная гражданская служба: кому положена и как добиться [Alternative civilian service: who is entitled to it and how to achieve it], 10 November 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Sluzhba pomoschi prizyvnikam, Альтернативная гражданская служба — 2023: условия и требования [Alternative civil service - 2023: conditions and requirements], 10 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷ Russia, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Order of 17 March 2022 N 133n, Об утверждении перечней видов работ, профессий, должностей, на которых могут быть заняты граждане, проходящие альтернативную гражданскую службу, и организаций, где предусматривается прохождение альтернативной гражданской службы [On adoption of the lists of types of work, professions, and positions in which citizens undergoing alternative civilian service may be employed and organizations where alternative civilian service can be performed], 17 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Prizyva Net, Альтернативная служба [Alternative service], 19 January 2023, [url](#); Sluzhba pomoschi prizyvnikam, Альтернативная гражданская служба — 2023: условия и требования [Alternative civil service - 2023: conditions and requirements], 10 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Prizyva Net, Альтернативная служба [Alternative service], 19 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ Pravo Ru, Альтернативная гражданская служба: кому положена и как добиться [Alternative civilian service: who is entitled to it and how to achieve it], 10 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Russia, Федеральный закон от 26 февраля 1997 г. N 31-ФЗ "О мобилизационной подготовке и мобилизации в Российской Федерации" (с изменениями и дополнениями) [Federal Act No. 31-FZ of 26 February 1997 on mobilization training and mobilization in the Russian Federation (as amended)], 4 November 2022, [url](#), Article 17.1

¹⁰² Novaya Gazeta Europe, Putin signs law allowing to mobilise citizens with outstanding criminal record for grave crimes, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

3.1.2. Treatment of draft evaders

In the period between 1 May to 20 September 2022 – as reported by TV channel RBC based on the data from the State Automated System (GAS) and the Moscow City Court – 410 criminal cases on draft evasion from obligatory military service or alternative civil service were brought before the Russian courts, which is the maximum in ten years. In the same period in 2021, 385 such cases were brought to courts.¹⁰³ Based on data from the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the independent media outlet Bumaga reported that 564 persons were convicted by courts for draft evasion in the first half of 2022. This figure represents an increase from 497 convictions for the same period of 2021 and corresponds to the number of convictions for the whole year of 2020, during which 562 persons were found guilty of draft evasion. Bumaga noted that in all the cases recorded by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the punishment for draft evasion was a fine: since 2016 till June 2022, none of the convicted persons was sentenced to imprisonment.¹⁰⁴

3.1.3. Use of conscripts in the fighting in Ukraine

At the end of December 2022, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that conscripts would not be involved in hostilities in Ukraine. Most of the newly conscripted servicemen were said to be sent to training and military units to undergo training for up to five months.¹⁰⁵ Russian General Staff similarly stated that conscripts would not be sent to Ukraine or the Russia-occupied regions.¹⁰⁶ According to the Assessment of the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), the statements of MoD that the conscripts drafted in autumn 2022 would not be used in the fighting in Ukraine were probably made to curb attempts of draft dodging.¹⁰⁷ The MoD also stated that conscripts who have fulfilled their military service have been discharged on time and sent to their places of residence.¹⁰⁸ It was not possible to corroborate this information within the time constraints of this query.

¹⁰³ RBC, Число дел за уклонение от армии с весны вышло на максимум за 10 лет [The number of cases of evasion from the army since spring reached the maximum in 10 years], 2 October 2022, [url](#); News.am, RBC: Number of cases for evading army in Russia from spring to announcement of mobilization reaches maximum in 10 years, 2 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Bumaga, В России стали чаще судить уклонистов, выяснила «Бумага». Число уголовных дел выросло на 66 % и продолжает расти [“Bumaga” found out that trials of evaders became more frequent. The number of criminal cases has increased by 66 % and continues to grow. The number of criminal cases increased by 66% and continues to grow], 15 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Kommersant, Минобороны сообщило о завершении осеннего призыва [The Defense Ministry announced the end of the autumn draft], 31 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ Meduza, Russian General Staff promises not to send mandatory-service conscripts to Ukraine or annexed territories, 31 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ ISW, Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, 31 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ Kommersant, Минобороны сообщило о завершении осеннего призыва [The Defense Ministry announced the end of the autumn draft], 31 December 2022, [url](#)

Previously, there were several instances when conscripts were forced to sign contracts.¹⁰⁹ According to Sergei Krivenko, interviewed by DIS in October 2022, in several cases, contracts were signed on behalf of a conscript by another person; according to the source this was happening due to the lack of monitoring or control.¹¹⁰ In December 2022, Krivenko noted in an interview with media outlet Current Time that conscripts would be probably offered to sign a contract as soon as they start their military service, which would enable their deployment to Ukraine as contract soldiers. According to the source, such persuasion was a widely used practice.¹¹¹

3.2. Contract servicemen

On 21 December 2022, Sergei Shoigu announced a plan to increase the size of RAF from 1 million to 1.5 million, including the increase in the number of contract servicemen¹¹² to 695 000 in total and to 521 000 by the end of 2023. On 6 January 2023, based on the information from open sources, BBC Russian Service confirmed the names of 11 009 Russian servicemen killed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, noting that the real number of those who have participated in the hostilities in Ukraine and were brought for burial in Russia is 40-60 % higher. The U.K. Defense Secretary stated in December 2022, that 100 000 Russian soldiers were killed, injured, or deserted the army since 24 February 2022.¹¹³

Following the announcement of the decree on 'partial mobilisation' on 21 September 2022, contract servicemen should remain on active duty until the end of the mobilisation, which makes it impossible to terminate one's contract except in cases of reaching the retirement age, being recognized unfit by a medical commission, or being convicted of a felony.¹¹⁴ On 15 December 2022, independent outlet Mediazona reported that a servicewoman employed at a records office in one of military units in Moscow was denied to be discharged on a basis that there was a presidential decree stating that active contracts were to be prolonged until the end of the 'partial' mobilisation.¹¹⁵

According to the Russian legislation, soldiers/navy sailors and sergeants/foremen of Russian nationality sign their first contract with RAF for a duration of 2 or 3 years; a renewal contract is signed for 1, 3, 5, or 10 years or is open-ended. Starting from the rank of warrant

¹⁰⁹ AP, Russian military announces plan to expand, create new units, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 18, 66

¹¹¹ Current Time, "К розыску призывников в РФ подключились полицейские". Пробивают телефоны, смотрят камеры наружного наблюдения. Рассказывает правозащитник ["Police officers joined the search for conscripts in Russia." They search phones, watch surveillance cameras. The human rights activist explains], 17 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹² Luzhin, P., The Russian army in 2023, Riddle, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹³ AP, Russian military announces plan to expand, create new units, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Politico, Full text of Putin's mobilization decree — translated, 21 September 2022, [url](#); DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁵ Mediazona, "I'm enslaved." A servicewoman's contract with the Russian military expired, but the army doesn't let her go, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

officer/midshipman as well as for officers, the duration of the first contract is 5 years; upon renewal, a contract is signed for 3, 5, or 10 years or is open-ended.¹¹⁶

On 7 December 2022, Reuters reported that a former serviceman, who was barred from leaving Russia as an army officer and crossed illegally into Kazakhstan in September 2022, stated that he could not leave Russia legally even after his resignation as he was defined “as a person who has access to classified information.”¹¹⁷ Reporting on his deportation from Kazakhstan, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) service Sibir.Realii stated that he was a major of the Federal Guard Service (FSO).¹¹⁸ According to the Russian legislation, the right of a Russian national to leave Russia can be temporarily restricted if he has access to classified information or has signed a contract that stipulates temporary restriction to leave the country.¹¹⁹

3.3. Mobilisation

On 28 October 2022, the Russian MoD announced the end of the ‘partial’ mobilisation,¹²⁰ reporting that 318 000 persons were drafted into RAF.¹²¹ However, the ‘partial’ mobilisation decree has no end date and therefore, as noted by experts, allows for the additional draft.¹²² Ukrainian officials have made warnings about a second wave of mobilisation to start in winter 2022 on numerous occasions.¹²³ On 7 January 2023, Ukrainian intelligence officials estimated that the additional draft could start in mid-January, with the number of people to be additionally mobilised potentially reaching 500 000.¹²⁴ The Russian authorities have repeatedly denied plans to launch a second mobilisation wave,¹²⁵ stating that the mobilisation was completed on 31 October 2022,¹²⁶ and that there was no need for a presidential decree to officially end it.¹²⁷

¹¹⁶ Russia, Законы, кодексы и нормативно-правовые акты Российской Федерации [Laws, codes and regulations of the Russian Federation], Федеральный закон от 28.03.1998 N 53-ФЗ (ред. от 24.09.2022) "О воинской обязанности и военной службе" [Federal Law of 28 March 1998 N 53-FZ (version of 24 September 2022) On Military Duty and Military Service], [url](#), Art. 38

¹¹⁷ Reuters, Russian officer who fled to Kazakhstan could be deported, family says, 7 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ Sibir.Realii, Сбежавшего от войны в Казахстан майора ФСО депортировали в Россию [The FSO major who escaped from the war in Kazakhstan was deported to Russia], 29 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Konsultant Plyus, Почему может быть ограничен выезд за границу? [Why travelling abroad can be restricted?], 23 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁰ Moscow Times (The), Russian Defense Minister Announces End of Mobilisation, 28 October 2022, [url](#)

¹²¹ Reuters, Russia's Putin says 318,000 mobilised – Interfax, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

¹²² AP, Russian military announces plan to expand, create new units, 21 December 2022, [url](#)

¹²³ Meduza, Генштаб ВСУ: в России готовят новую волну «скрытой мобилизации» с 10 декабря [AFU General Staff: Russia is preparing a new wave of "hidden mobilization" from December 10], 27 November 2022, [url](#); Politico, Ukraine defense chief warns of new Russian mobilisation, 31 December 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Politico, Moscow to mobilize 500,000 new conscripts, Kyiv military intelligence says, 7 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Reuters, Kremlin: No talk of new round of mobilisation, 21 November 2022, [url](#); AP, Russian military announces plan to expand, create new units, 21 December 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), Russia preparing to mobilise extra 500,000 conscripts, claims Ukraine, 6 January 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶ Reuters, After weeks of chaos, Russia says partial mobilisation is complete, 31 October 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷ Reuters, Kremlin says it will not issue a decree ending Russian mobilisation, 1 November 2022, [url](#)

Experts interviewed by DIS in autumn 2022, noted that a second or even a third wave of mobilisation was to be expected to replace killed, injured, deserted, and captured servicemen.¹²⁸ At the beginning of January 2023, Sergei Krivenko told Deutsche Welle (DW) that new recruits would be needed to substitute the already mobilised people on the battleground.¹²⁹ On 12 January 2023, local media outlet Verstka reported on preparations by some governmental organisations in Moscow either to deliver draft notices or to help to deal with the instances of irregularities. According to one of the sources reached by Verstka, conscripts who were just discharged from their obligatory one-year military service would be drafted first.¹³⁰ On 13 January 2023, Pavel Chikov gave an opinion in his Telegram channel that certain additional recruitment was to be expected soon but it was unlikely that it would involve a draft of hundreds of thousands of people. According to the same source, there would be likely no announcement about the additional recruitment and people would learn about when the draft notices would be sent out.¹³¹

There were reports that draft notices were delivered after the official ending of the mobilisation.¹³² According to a counselor from St. Petersburg's Legislative Assembly, as reported by Reuters on 6 December 2022, there have been instances when military recruitment offices have issued January and February draft notices already at the beginning of December.¹³³ Sergei Krivenko noted at the beginning of January 2023 that mobilisation was continuing, even if MoD was drafting people of 'some specific specialisations.'¹³⁴ No information on profiles of people receiving draft notices in the frames of continuing mobilisation was found during the time constraints of this query.

On 4 November 2022, President Putin signed a law to lift a ban on mobilisation of people who have unexpunged or outstanding conviction for a grave crime¹³⁵, such as murder, robbery, larceny, or drug trafficking.¹³⁶ The exemptions are to be made for those convicted of sex

¹²⁸ DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹²⁹ DW, Вторая волна мобилизации в России: что известно о подготовке [The second wave of mobilization in Russia: what is known about preparations], 5 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁰ Verstka, «Январь-Февраль «будет тяжелым»» – Какие признаки указывают на возможность новой мобилизации [“January-February “will be hard”” – What signs are pointing to the possibility of a new mobilisation], 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³¹ Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 13 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³² Reuters, Russian regional deputies urge Putin to issue decree ending mobilisation, 6 December 2022, [url](#); DW, Вторая волна мобилизации в России: что известно о подготовке [The second wave of mobilization in Russia: what is known about preparations], 5 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³³ Reuters, Russian regional deputies urge Putin to issue decree ending mobilisation, 6 December 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ DW, Вторая волна мобилизации в России: что известно о подготовке [The second wave of mobilization in Russia: what is known about preparations], 5 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁵ Novaya Gazeta Europe, Putin signs law allowing to mobilise citizens with outstanding criminal record for grave crimes, 4 November 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶ CNN, Putin signs law to mobilize Russian citizens convicted of serious crimes, 5 November 2022, [url](#)

crimes against minors, terrorism, treason, attempted assassination of a government official, and some other crimes.¹³⁷

On 6 January 2023, BBC Russian confirmed the deaths of 539 persons drafted under the 'partial' mobilisation order of 21 September 2022 (excluding those who died in Ukrainian strike on Makiivka on 1 January 2023¹³⁸), noting that 500 of them were killed in Ukraine and 39 died in Russia due to health reasons, accidents, and alcohol consumption.¹³⁹

3.3.1. Exemptions and deferrals

In mid-January 2023, a question about deferrals for fathers of three, granted by MoD on 4 October 2022, was raised after a State Duma deputy stated that the General Staff of RAF had cancelled this deferral at the end of December 2022. This claim was reportedly denied by a senior lawmaker while Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that the Kremlin "is not aware" of such cancellation.¹⁴⁰ A local online newspaper Chita.ru reported that a military commissar of Zabaikalsky region confirmed the cancellation of the deferral in December.¹⁴¹ In Dagestan, a military recruitment office reportedly told a lawyer of a mobilised father of three that the deferral was not applicable to those who had been drafted before 4 October 2022. According to the lawyer, many persons in Dagestan in similar situations received refusals based on the same reasoning.¹⁴²

Sources reported on the lack of medical examinations for people drafted under the mobilisation order¹⁴³ and on instances when people with chronic illnesses were found fit for military service.¹⁴⁴ On 14 November 2022, Meduza reported on instances when men with HIV/AIDS had been drafted under the mobilisation order. While this medical status constitutes

¹³⁷ Novaya Gazeta Europe, Putin signs law allowing to mobilise citizens with outstanding criminal record for grave crimes, 4 November 2022, [url](#); CNN, Putin signs law to mobilize Russian citizens convicted of serious crimes, 5 November 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Guardian (The), Makiivka strike: what we know about the deadliest attack on Russian troops since Ukraine war began, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁹ BBC Russian, Погибли более 500 мобилизованных: что известно о потерях России в Украине к январю [More than 500 mobilised men are dead: what is known about Russian losses in Ukraine by January], 6 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Moscow Times (The), Senior Russia Lawmaker Denies End to Mobilization Deferment For Fathers, 13 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Chita.ru, Право на отсрочку от мобилизации отменили многодетным отцам — военком Забайкалья [The right for mobilisation deferral was canceled for fathers with many children - Military Commissar of Transbaikalia], 13 January 2023, [url](#); Moscow Times (The), Senior Russia Lawmaker Denies End to Mobilization Deferment For Fathers, 13 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴² Kavkazskiy Uzel, Адвокат потребовал вернуть домой мобилизованного многодетного жителя Дагестана [Lawyer demanded to return home a mobilised resident of Dagestan who is a father of three], 13 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴³ Fontanka.ru, «Есть две категории — живые и мертвые». «Фонтанка» узнала, почему мобилизованным отказывают в медкомиссии [There are two categories - the living and the dead. "Fontanka" found out why mobilized people are denied a medical examination], 25 November 2022, [url](#); Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 28 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Verstka, Папа, ты уже тысячу дней не едешь [Daddy, you haven't come already one thousand days], 7 December 2022, [url](#); Baza, Telegram, 20 December 2022, [url](#)

an exemption from military service, military recruitment officers were reportedly ignoring respective medical history/documents.¹⁴⁵ On 31 January 2023, the Russian Prosecutor General reported that more than 9 000 people who were unlawfully drafted under the mobilisation order, including those with health issues, had been returned home.¹⁴⁶

On 16 January 2023, the State Duma did not approve a proposal for a bill to provide doctorate degree holders an exemption from a draft under mobilisation. The proposal was lodged in October 2022.¹⁴⁷

No information on punishments under the law or any other types of punishments for people who evaded being drafted under the ‘partial’ mobilisation order of 21 September 2022 was found in the time constraints of this query.

3.3.2. Alternative civil service for people drafted under the mobilisation order

The official position of the authorities was that alternative civil service is not to be provided during the mobilisation period.¹⁴⁸ In February 2023, the State Duma was to examine a proposal to substitute military service under mobilisation conditions with alternative civil service.¹⁴⁹

On 31 January 2023, Caucasian Knot reported on the increase of interest toward alternative civil service in the North Caucasus in relation with ‘partial’ mobilisation. According to a lawyer cited by the source, who described the situation in Chechnya and Ingushetia, alternative civil service used to be unpopular because young people feared accusations in cowardice, but the situation has changed after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.¹⁵⁰

3.3.3. Deployment to Ukraine and conditions of service

On 7 December 2022, President Putin stated that 150 000 out of 318 000 men drafted under the mobilisation order had been deployed to Ukraine.¹⁵¹ Soldiers who are not sent to take part in hostilities fill vacancies in military units in Russia.¹⁵² In January 2023, media reported that

¹⁴⁵ Meduza, Fight or flight Russians living with HIV navigate mobilization and emigration, 14 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Novaya Gazeta Europe, Prosecutor General: over 9,000 people mobilised illegally in Russia, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Forbes, Юристы Госдумы не одобрили освобождение от мобилизации для кандидатов и докторов наук [Lawyers of State Duma did not approve exemption from mobilization for candidates and doctors of science], 17 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ Forum 18, Russia: No legal provision for alternative civilian service during mobilisation, 19 December 2022, [url](#); DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁴⁹ Voenny ombudsmen, Telegram, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Kavkazskiy Uzel, Юристы прокомментировали перспективы альтернативной службы для жителей Северного Кавказа [Lawyers commented on the prospects of alternative service for residents of the North Caucasus], 31 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ Politico, Ukraine defense chief warns of new Russian mobilization, 31 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵² Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 13 January 2023, [url](#)

groups of servicemen mobilised from Yaroslavl¹⁵³ and Novosibirsk regions were promised to serve in the defense forces but were sent instead to the frontlines without receiving any training or equipment.¹⁵⁴

On 6 December 2022, Reuters reported on appeals of members of five regional councils of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Karelia, Pskov, and Veliky Novgorod regions to President Putin to issue a decree to end the partial mobilisation, as the lack of such decree was creating “legal uncertainty” and allowed a continuation of the mobilisation and led to a situation, in which military commanders were refusing discharge from military service of already mobilised people. Reportedly, an opposition councillor in Karelia said that “[c]ommanders refused to discharge them, and appeals against such refusals in court led nowhere” as “[c]ourts were siding with commanders citing the fact that Putin's September mobilisation decree still had legal force.” Reuters was able to confirm with military lawyers that this happened in at least two court cases: in the Moscow region and in Chita.¹⁵⁵

4. Military recruitment in Chechnya

Since conscription in Chechnya resumed in the autumn 2014, it has involved only 500 young Chechens per year¹⁵⁶, conscripted only during the autumn draft:¹⁵⁷ 100 to serve in the Interior Ministry forces and 400 in Russian army units in the southern military district.¹⁵⁸ According to members of military commissariats, interviewed by Caucasus Times and Caucasian Knot, many Chechens were volunteering for conscription beyond the number of available places¹⁵⁹ and a difficult selection process was organised to select the recruits.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Meduza, Мобилизованные из Ярославской области сообщили, что их хотят обвинить в дезертирстве за оставление позиций по приказу командования [Mobilized men from the Yaroslavl region reported that they were threatened with desertion for leaving their positions by order of their commander], 18 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Ostorozhno, novosti, Telegram, 25 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Reuters, Russian regional deputies urge Putin to issue decree ending mobilisation, 6 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ RBK, Эксперты опасаются конфликтов в случае призыва в армию жителей Чечни [Experts fear conflict if Chechen residents are drafted into the army], 21 September 2014, [url](#); Vatchagaev, M., Kadyrov Succeeds in Pressuring Moscow to Renew the Military Draft in Chechnya, The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 11, Issue 169, 25 September 2014, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ Kavkaz.Realii, Военный призыв на Северном Кавказе резко сокращается [Military conscription in the North Caucasus is drastically reduced], 4 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ Kavkazskiy Uzel, Сто срочников из Чечни приступили к службе во внутренних войсках МВД России [One hundred Chechen conscripts began their service in the internal troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia], 17 January 2015, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ Kavkazskiy Uzel, Первые призывники отправлены в армию из Чечни [The first conscripts from Chechnya were sent to the army], 18 October 2017, [url](#); Caucasus Times, Чеченцы платят за службу в Армии [Chechens pay to serve in the army], 25 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ Kavkaz.Realii, Военный призыв на Северном Кавказе резко сокращается [Military conscription in the North Caucasus is drastically reduced], 4 October 2017, [url](#); Kavkazskiy Uzel, Первые призывники отправлены в армию из Чечни [The first conscripts from Chechnya were sent to the army], 18 October 2017, [url](#); TASS, Chechnya to miss spring draft, 12 April 2016, [url](#); Kavkazskiy Uzel, Четверо призывников из Чечни подозреваются в дедовщине в воинской части в Ставропольском крае [Four conscripts from Chechnya are suspected of dedovshchina in a unit in Stavropol Krai], 22 February 2015, [url](#)

Since May 2022, there have been reports of Chechens who were illegally abducted or arrested and taken by force to police stations where they were demanded either to volunteer to take part in the hostilities in Ukraine or to pay ransoms of 200 000 – 500 000 roubles [2 538 – 6 345 EUR] through the use of violence and “under the threat of being subjected to fabricated criminal charges, having their relatives kidnapped, and having their female relatives subjected to various humiliating procedures.” According to the human rights NGO Memorial, the abductees were mostly “young men who had already attracted the attention of the law enforcement agencies.”¹⁶¹

Sources noted that while the Chechen authorities refused to implement the ‘partial’ mobilisation order of 21 September 2022¹⁶² they continued mobilising people to take part in the hostilities in Ukraine after the central authorities announced the end of the mobilisation on 28 October 2022.¹⁶³ Caucasian Knot reported on 9 February 2023 that around 300 people had been employed by law enforcement bodies of Chechnya since December 2022, noting that it was possible that they would be further deployed to Ukraine.¹⁶⁴ As reported by the same source at the end of July 2022, ‘[w]hen applying for law enforcer’s job, a person will be enrolled in the reserve, and then face the fact that he is obliged to go and take part in the special operation.’ According to an imam of a mosque in Gudermes, who was involved in enforcement bodies’ recruitment, Chechnya was facing a shortage of law enforcement officers because of sending men to war.¹⁶⁵ On 11 January 2023, Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that 21 000 Chechens had been sent to fight in Ukraine.¹⁶⁶

According to Caucasian Knot and its editor-in-chief Gregory Shvedov, who was interviewed by DIS in October 2022, the number of Chechens who had left Chechnya in 2022 increased. Thus, between January 2022 and August 2022, 948 people left Chechnya according to the Chechen statistical service, compared to 325 for the same period in 2021.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Memorial, Северный Кавказ и Украина: 20 недель ‘специальной военной операции’ [North Caucasus and Ukraine: 20 weeks of ‘special military operation’], 15 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 23-24

¹⁶² DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁶³ DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 33; Кавказский Узел [Caucasian Knot], Угроза Кадырова продолжить мобилизацию стала частью кампании по рекрутингу в Чечне [Kadyrov’s threat to continue mobilization became part of a recruitment campaign in Chechnya], 1 November 2022, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, “Authorities announce dispatch of a new group of Chechen militaries to Ukraine”, 20 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Caucasian Knot, “Kadyrov reports about 300 people employed by Chechen law enforcement bodies”, 9 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ Caucasian Knot, “Kadyrov reports about 300 people employed by Chechen law enforcement bodies”, 9 February 2023, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, “Imams’ involvement in recruitment reveals law enforcers’ shortage in Chechnya”, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ Caucasian Knot, “Kadyrov reports about 300 people employed by Chechen law enforcement bodies”, 9 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 34; Caucasian Knot, Amid mobilization, number of those who leave Chechnya increase significantly, 14 October 2022, [url](#)

5. Treatment of deserters and servicemen refusing deployment to Ukraine

On 20 January 2023, Pavel Chikov reported on the increase in 2022 in the number of court cases initiated in relation to unauthorised abandonment of a military unit (Article 337 of the Criminal Code) and desertion (Article 338 of the Criminal Code).¹⁶⁸ On 25 January 2023, lawyer Maksim Grebenyuk noted on the increase in the number of offences related to unauthorized abandonment of a military unit and failure to execute an order (Article 332).¹⁶⁹ Two experts interviewed by DIS in October and beginning of November 2022 noted that Russian authorities were hiding the cases of military desertion from the public.¹⁷⁰

On 16 December 2022, independent online media Mediazona noted that, based on records of military garrison courts, the courts started issuing first sentences on desertion and abandonment of a military unit in the time of mobilisation. On 6 and 7 December, two servicemen from Veliky Novgorod and Solnechnogorsk were sentenced respectively to five and four years' imprisonment on probation for leaving their military units. On 14 December, Murmansk garrison military court sentenced a serviceman for desertion and attempted illegal border crossing; the punishment was not made public.¹⁷¹ At the beginning of January 2023, a military court in Moscow region sentenced a 30-year-old sergeant to two years' imprisonment on probation as he had left his field camp situated near the Russia-Ukraine border in Valuysky district, Belgorod region, for the period between June and September 2022. In March 2022, he was named a 'hero' of the war by MoD due to his activities in the fighting.¹⁷²

Court cases, in which servicemen were sentenced to real imprisonment due to abandonment of their places of service include, but not exhaustively, the following cases. In December 2022, the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk military garrison court sentenced a serviceman, who had abandoned his military unit in Belgorod region in June 2022, to three years in a penal colony.¹⁷³ On 23 December, the Chelyabinsk military garrison court sentenced a contract soldier in a rank of a private to 5 years and 1 months in prison.¹⁷⁴ On 29 December 2022, the

¹⁶⁸ Pavel Chikov, Telegram, 20 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ RBC, В России в два раза выросло количество преступлений против военной службы [The number of crimes against military service has doubled in Russia], 25 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ DIS, Russia – an update on military service since July 2022, December 2022, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁷¹ Mediazona, В России вынесли первые три приговора по статьям о дезертирстве и самовольном оставлении части в период мобилизации [In Russia, first three sentences under the articles on desertion and abandonment of units during mobilisation were handed out], 16 December 2022, [url](#); Meduza, Russian courts begin sentencing for desertion and AWOL during mobilization, 16 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷² Novaya Gazeta Europe, Суд в Подмоскowie приговорил к 2 годам условно за уклонение от службы военного, который в начале войны «одним выстрелом уничтожил 5 БТР» [A court in the Moscow region sentenced a serviceman who "destroyed 5 APCs with a single shot" at the beginning of the war to 2-years in prison on probation for evading military service], 6 January 2023, [url](#), Russian Life, From Hero to Zero, 11 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Sibir.Realii, Военнослужащий с Сахалина сбежал из части, чтобы не идти на войну [A serviceman from Sakhalin escaped from his unit to avoid going to war], 30 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ DP, Контрактника из Челябинска приговорили к 5 годам ИК за уклонение от мобилизации [Contract soldier from Chelyabinsk sentenced to 5 years in prison for evading mobilization], 23 December 2022, [url](#)

Ufa military garrison court sentenced a 27-year-old man, who had signed a two-year-contract with MoD in January 2022 and left his place of service to avoid the participation 'in a special military operation' in Ukraine to three years of prison in a general regime penal colony. Reportedly, the court did not take into consideration the defendant's explanation that he left the service to take care of his disabled father on the grounds that his sister was also providing such care.¹⁷⁵ On 12 January 2023, the Ufa garrison military court sentenced a 24-year-old corporal to five years in prison. Reportedly, he left his duty station in May 2022 to avoid deployment to Ukraine¹⁷⁶ and went into hiding until September.¹⁷⁷

On 18 January 2023, media reported that police shot dead a soldier whom they were trying to arrest for deserting from Ukraine with a firearm.¹⁷⁸ The same day, Russian media outlet Kommersant reported that a criminal case for desertion with weapons during the armed conflict was opened against eight servicemen from Kaliningrad region, who reportedly left their camp in Luhansk in December 2022 to avoid being sent to the frontlines and came to Russia. All eight men were drafted under the mobilisation order on 24 September and were deployed to Ukraine on 12 November 2022.¹⁷⁹

Servicemen who refuse deployment to Ukraine are tried under the Article 332 of the Criminal Code 'Failure to execute an order',¹⁸⁰ which, in its version amended on 24 September 2022, stipulates a punishment in the form of a prison term for up to 10 years.¹⁸¹ At the end of December 2022, a serviceman in Kamchatka region was sentenced to one year and eight months in prison colony for refusing to take part in the fighting in Ukraine. The court stated that the serviceman refused the deployment to Ukraine, ordered by a commander of his military unit. The man reportedly appealed against the court decision.¹⁸² A former military officer, interviewed by BBC on 2 February 2023, stated he had tried to resign from the army several times but ended up being dismissed from the service due to his refusal to return to Ukraine.¹⁸³ On 7 February 2023, local media reported on the first two cases, when soldiers were sentenced to a prison term for a refusal of deployment to Ukraine in Russia-occupied

¹⁷⁵ Kommersant, Суд впервые осудил жителя Башкирии за самовольное оставление части во время мобилизации [For the first time, the court convicted a resident of Bashkiria for unauthorized abandonment of his unit during mobilization], 29 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Moscow Times (The), Russian Soldier Jailed for 5 Years for Refusing To Fight in Ukraine, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ United Press Service of the Courts of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Telegram, 12 January 2023, [url](#); Radio Svoboda, Ефрейтор получил пять лет колонии по делу об уклонении от службы [A corporal received five years in the penal colony for evading military service], 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ RFE/RL, Russian Soldier Killed During Arrest For Desertion, 18 January 2023, [url](#); Moscow Times (The), Russian Soldier Killed After Deserting Military Base, 18 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ Kommersant, Сержант переехал с СВО в СИЗО [A sergeant moved from special military operation area to pre-trial detention], 18 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ RBC, Военного приговорили к 1,7 года за отказ от участия в боях на Украине [Serviceman sentenced to 1.7 years for refusing to fight in Ukraine], 27 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ Russia, Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 29.12.2022) [Criminal Code of the Russian Federation of 13.06.1996 N 63-FZ (version 24.09.2022)], 29 December 2022, [url](#), Art. 332

¹⁸² RBC, Военного приговорили к 1,7 года за отказ от участия в боях на Украине [Serviceman sentenced to 1.7 years for refusing to fight in Ukraine], 27 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸³ BBC News, Russian army officer admits: 'Our troops tortured Ukrainians', 2 February 2023, [url](#)

Sevastopol. As reported by the media, convicts were cousins, who were serving in the Belgorod garrison of Russia's Amur region. Both pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 3 years and 4 month and 3 years and 5 months respectively in a penal colony.¹⁸⁴

According to media sources, servicemen of RAF situated in Ukraine are subjected to detention and ill-treatment, in case they refuse to continue fighting or return to the frontlines.¹⁸⁵ On 17 December 2022, a Russian investigative media outlet The Insider reported on the execution of at least 10 mercenaries of Wagner Group who had refused to continue fighting in Ukraine.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Krymsky Veter, Telegram, 7 February 2023, [url](#); Ukrinform, Russia sentences soldiers for refusing to fight against Ukraine, 7 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ BBC News, Ukraine war: The Russians locked up for refusing to fight, 12 December 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, 'I Didn't Think I'd Survive': Russian Volunteer Soldier Who Quit Ukraine War Recalls His Ordeal, 9 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Insider (The), Экс-командир убитого кувалдой Нужина рассказал о 10 казнях вагнеровцев [Ex-Commander of the Killed by Sledgehammer Nuzhin told about 10 executions of Wagnerians], 16 December 2022, [url](#); Independent Kyiv (The), Russian media: Wagner Group executes 10 mercenaries for refusing to fight in Ukraine, 17 December 2022, [url](#)

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