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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014 - Russia

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Russia is relatively ethnically diverse, with a number of minorities, migrant communities and indigenous peoples within its territory. However, 2013 saw a number of developments that highlighted the country's ongoing failure to achieve inclusion for many of these groups. Political struggles in the North Caucasus have stoked hostility and conflict against North Caucasians migrating within the Russian Federation. Migrants from other minority communities similarly face hostility, which is reinforced by nationalist rhetoric in political and public discourse drawing a divide between ethnic Russians and other ethnic groups.

Widespread xenophobic sentiment in Russia provides the context for racist violence. In surveys of the Russian population conducted by the Levada Center in 2013, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of respondents agreed that migrants from the former Soviet Republics should be deported – up from 53 per cent in 2006 – while just over half of the respondents (54 per cent) thought that immigration from the Caucasus should be restricted and over two out of five (45 per cent) that restrictions should also apply to immigration from China and Central Asia. Anti-Muslim sentiment associating Muslims with terrorism is also prevalent.

As a result, as reported by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in its 2013 *ECRI Report on the Russian Federation*, there has been a 'high incidence' of violence targeting mainly non-Slavs, including migrants from the North Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as people of African origin. Among the victims of racist and xenophobic violence in Russia in 2013, according to the Moscow-based SOVA Center, 13 victims originating from Central Asian countries were murdered by far-right activists, with a further 45 people injured; three people originating from the Caucasus were also murdered, with 26 injured. In one murder in November 2013 a woman from Russia's predominantly Muslim region of Dagestan was found in the stairwell of a Moscow apartment building with cross-shaped symbols slashed on her body. The SOVA Center recorded 21 people killed and 178 people injured in racist attacks during 2013. These figures compared with 19 people killed and 191 wounded in 2012.

Attacks usually escalate around the time of the 4 November National Unity Day, often associated with the annual Russian marches on the day – mass demonstrations by nationalists in a number of major cities in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. In 2013 the main march involving 6,000 participants took place in the Lyublino district of Moscow. Some of the banners on display called for migrants to return to their home countries, others had slogans such as 'Russia for Russians' and 'Today mosque – tomorrow jihad'. Some demonstrators were arrested by police for shouting Nazi slogans and displaying banned symbols. While the march itself was reported to be generally peaceful, some of the participants afterwards smashed up car windows and started brawls with people who appeared to come from the Caucasus. A week after the march, Mais Kurbanov, a leader of Moscow's migrant community, was reportedly injured in an attack with a stun gun, which was suspected to have been carried out in retaliation for his organization's public statement against the march.

Moscow and St Petersburg are predominant sites of racist violence, but attacks also occur in other cities and regions across the Russian Federation. Some of the attacks have involved collective mob violence. In October 2013, coinciding with the Muslim festival of *Eid al-Adha*, violent protests occurred in the Biryulyovo district of Moscow, following the fatal stabbing of a local 25-year-old ethnic Russian by a man believed by residents to have been from the Caucasus or Central Asia. The violence, which resulted in the murders of an Uzbek and an Azeri who were found stabbed to death, was considered by some commentators to mark a turning point, as the participants were local residents and not just nationalist activists, indicating how xenophobic sentiment and support for racist violence are not confined to an extreme fringe. Another episode took place in December in the Nizhny Novgorod region city of Arzamas, when anti-immigrant riots erupted following a brawl in a café in which a local resident was killed. Locals blamed Armenian migrants for the death.

Following the Biryulyovo riots, Reuters and other news sources reported that police rounded up and detained over 1,600 migrants at two vegetable markets in Moscow. Similarly, earlier in the year following a brawl between Dagestani market traders and police during Moscow's summer mayoral elections, police reportedly rounded up and detained 3,500 non-ethnic Russians mostly from Central Asia and Vietnam, with some later deported. Sweeps of minority communities have also followed terrorist incidents. Hundreds, including many from Central Asia and the North Caucasus, were stopped and detained after the December Volgograd bombings. While according to official figures there has been a significant decline in racist violence in the Russian Federation since 2007 and 2008, sources such as the Russian Analytical Digest suggest that 2013 was a peak year for ethnically motivated violence, given the anti-migrant rhetoric prevalent in the Moscow mayoral election campaigns.

Nevertheless, the Russian authorities have taken some steps to address the ongoing problem of racist violence; measures have included the strengthening of legislative provisions. According to the SOVA Center, prosecutions led to the convictions of 59 people for racist violent crime in 2013, compared with 72 people in 2012. Four were exempted from punishment, and 12 others were given suspended sentences. The SOVA Center noted that suspended sentences add to a climate of impunity and found the high percentage (20 per cent) in 2013 of convictions for violent racist attacks leading to suspended sentences 'alarming'. There were also convictions against 133 people on charges of xenophobic propaganda. The police have specifically targeted racist groups, and in 2013 new groups were added to the *Federal List of Extremist Organizations*. Some extremist publications have also been suppressed, with the *Federal List of Extremist Materials* expanding from 1,589 to 2,179 entries in 2013.

Despite these steps, the application of anti-extremist legislation remains uneven, and on occasion has been used against members of minority communities as well as human rights activists and political dissidents to secure prosecutions and ban publications. Anti-discrimination legislation is also applied only infrequently, while no designated bodies have yet been established to specifically target racism or discrimination. Furthermore, ECRI has highlighted the ongoing use of xenophobic and inflammatory anti-immigrant language by right-wing politicians, particularly during election campaigns, as well as regular incitement to hatred in the Russian media. ECRI has called for stronger codes of conduct and criminal sanctions to curb hate speech and denigration by public figures and media outlets, as well as the promotion of journalistic training programmes on human rights and anti-racism.

As in other European countries, social media provides a ready platform for racist and xenophobic sentiment in Russia. Social media outlets, such as Facebook, Instagram and Vkontakte, a Russian website similar to Facebook, are often used to propagate hate in Russia. In October 2013, HRW accused the radio station Vesti FM of inciting violence by publishing a map on its website that contained information about neighbourhoods where many undocumented migrants live. Another high-profile episode of hate speech occurred in April 2013 when Elmira Abdrazakova was targeted with ethnic slurs on her social media pages after being crowned 'Miss Russia'. Abdrazakova was born in Kazakhstan, and her father is Tatar. She grew up in Russia and holds Russian citizenship, but was criticized for not being Russian enough.

In recent years, some measures have been taken to reduce online hate speech – for example, a 2010 Supreme Court ruling enabling authorities to force media outlets to remove extremist or hateful material from their websites – as well as the creation of a number of centres monitoring hate speech online and in the media. During 2013, investigations were also launched against a Vkontakte user for a series of statements posted on the website encouraging targeted attacks against Jews and migrants.

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