



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note **Russian Federation: Military service**

Version 1.0

July 2023

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Executive summary

Updated on 25 July 2023

In general, deserting from or evading military service does not fall within the scope of the Refugee Convention. However, where a person faces punishment for refusing to do military service that would or might involve acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct, this may amount to persecution on grounds of political opinion.

One-year military service is compulsory for all men aged 18 to 27 in Russia: around 260,000 are conscripted each year. A March 2023 law extended the upper age limit to 30 while gradually raising the initial conscription age to 21 by 2026. Alternative civil service is available for those whom military duty contradicts their convictions or religious beliefs: around 2,000 apply each year of whom about 50% are accepted.

Men can be exempt from military service if they are medically unfit or their father/blood brother was killed during military service. Men can defer military service (and call-up during a mobilisation) on grounds of health, family circumstance, and certain students and professions. Conscripts can be deployed to conflict situations during war outside of Russia, including Ukraine. In practice most are not.

Russia operates a mass mobilisation system, which allows the call-up of reservists if the country is attacked or faces foreign aggression. A 'partial' mobilisation was implemented between 21 September and 28 October 2022, leading to the call-up of around 300,000 individuals. Many were deployed to the war in Ukraine. However, the decree authorising the mobilisation remains open and some men continue to receive summons to join the armed forces.

Evasion and desertion are punishable by law: penalties can lead to a prison sentence of up to 15 years. In practice most punishments are fines or short custodial sentences. Prison conditions vary but are generally poor and can be life-threatening. In general there are not strong grounds to depart from the [reported case of ZB's](#) finding that conditions generally do not breach Article of 3 ECHR.

Conditions in the armed forces are generally poor for conscripts and mobilised reservists with reports of abuses including torture, harassment and extra-judicial killings.

In general

- the available limited available information does not indicate that conditions in the armed forces or punishment for avoiding conscription and mobilisation are so severe as to amount to a real risk of serious harm
- the Russian armed forces have systematically committed a wide range of violations in Ukraine which may amount to war crimes / crimes against humanity and persons deployed to the war are likely to be involved in acts that are contrary to the basic rules of human conduct. However, at this time, conscripts and reservists are unlikely to be deployed to Ukraine.

There is no sufficiency of protection; internal relocation is not likely to be reasonable. Certification is unlikely to be suitable. Decision makers must decide each case on its facts.

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Assessment

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is information in the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution/serious harm by state actors because:
 - the treatment and/or conditions likely to be faced by the person during compulsory military service duties or while serving in the armed forces in a general or partial mobilisation; and/or
 - the penalties likely to be faced by the person's refusal to undertake, or their desertion from, military service duties or as part of a general or partial mobilisation; and/or
 - military service/serving in the armed forces as part of a partial or general mobilisation would involve acts, with which the person may be associated, which are contrary to the basic rules of human conduct
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person's claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits (See also [Acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct](#)).
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 In general, persons who simply evade/desert from military service do **not** fall within one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, including particular social group. This is because they
- do not share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it – **and**
 - they do not have a distinct identity which is perceived as being different by the surrounding society (see [Evasion and desertion](#)).
- 2.1.2 However, where a person faces punishment for a refusal to perform military service that would or might involve acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct, this may be capable of amounting to persecution on grounds of political opinion for the purposes of the Refugee Convention.
- 2.1.3 Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the (real or perceived) reasons why the state may target the person for refusing to undertake military service carefully considered.
- 2.1.4 For guidance on military service generally, see [Asylum Instruction on Military Service and Conscientious Objection](#).

2.1.5 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.6 For guidance on Humanitarian Protection see the Asylum Instruction, [Humanitarian Protection](#).

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3. Risk

3.1 Limits of available evidence

3.1.1 Reliable and detailed country evidence from credible sources about military service is difficult to obtain.

3.1.2 Since Russian armed forces invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 almost all Russian independent media has been banned, blocked or declared ‘foreign agents’, while the remainder are subject to censorship with reference, for example, to ‘war’ made illegal. Social media is tightly regulated with the spreading of false information punishable with up to 15 years in prison. The government is opaque about its workings and the war, and tightly controls information in areas occupied by its forces in Ukraine. The government has also used disinformation as an ‘operational tool’ to distort the narrative about the conflict and its actions in Ukraine (see [Limits of reporting](#)).

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3.2 Requirement to undertake national service (conscription)

3.2.1 Compulsory national service is a prerogative of sovereign states. It is therefore reasonable that draft evasion and desertion are criminal offences and punishable by law – points provided for in the UNHCR Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status (paragraphs 167 to 174) and confirmed by the [House of Lords in the case of Sepet & Another v. SSHD \[2003\] UKHL 15](#). The UNHCR Handbook further notes, ‘Desertion or draft-evasion does not, on the other hand, exclude a person from being a refugee, and a person may be a refugee in addition to being a deserter or draft-evader’ (paragraph 167). Therefore, the requirement to undergo compulsory military service – or punishment for failing to complete this duty – does not in itself constitute persecution.

3.2.2 At the time of writing, men aged 18 to 27 are required to undertake one-year military service unless they fall into one of the categories for exemption or qualify for alternative civil service. In March 2023, the Russian Duma passed a bill that raises the upper age limit of conscription to 30 and gradually increases the minimum conscription age by one year for each calendar year until reaching 21 in 2026 (see [General requirements for military service](#)).

3.2.3 There are 2 conscription intakes in the spring and autumn each year totalling around 260,000 conscripts. Approximately 30% of the armed forces and almost all reservists are (former) conscripts. The remainder are composed of contract (professional) soldiers and volunteers. The government is also using private security contractors, including, until June 2023, the Wagner Group, some of which have employed (or forcibly used) Russian prisoners to fight in Ukraine (see [Armed forces](#) and [General requirements for military](#)

[service](#)).

- 3.2.4 Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the law was amended to allow the government to send conscripts to combat zones. Russia has deployed over 150,000 men to fight in Ukraine but it is unclear how many are conscripts. Some sources indicate that hundreds have been deployed however there is no indication that large numbers of conscripts have been deployed to the war. There are also reports of conscripts being forced to become contract – professional – soldiers who have been deployed to fight in Ukraine (see [Deployment to Ukraine](#)).

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3.3 Mobilisation system

- 3.3.1 Men and women (reservists) may be called up during a mass mobilisation. Russia implemented a partial mobilisation in September and October 2022 which the government announced as complete on 28 October 2022 but in law remains open-ended. There have been some reports of men continuing to be summoned to serve in the armed forces. In general, reservists are not likely to be called up as part of the partial mobilisation at the time of writing. However, each case needs to be considered on its facts.
- 3.3.2 Russia operates a mass mobilisation system in the event of foreign aggression or an attack on the country. Reservists include:
- previous conscripts or those who have completed alternative civil service
 - contract soldiers whose contracts have ended
 - graduates of military educational institutions
 - men older than 27 who have not served due to delays in studies, health, or without legal grounds
 - women who have acquired military specialisms
 - doctors, orderlies and other representatives of the military registration specialties, including women
 - some professionals in fields such as communications, optics and computer technology (see [Armed forces](#))
- 3.3.3 Depending on the individual's skills and experience, reservists up to the age of 70 may be called-up (see [Armed forces](#)).
- 3.3.4 On 21 September 2022 President Putin signed into law a 'partial mobilisation' which applies to Russian nationals who had previously served in the military with the aim to call-up 300,000 reserve servicemen to assist in the war in Ukraine. The EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) observed that a large proportion of the reservists - around 50% - were deployed to Ukraine. The Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) announced that the 'partial mobilisation' was complete on 28 October 2022. However, media sources report that there was no decree ending the partial mobilisation and in practice it remains in effect with some men continuing to receive summons to report to enlistment offices (see [Mobilisation of reservists](#)).
- 3.3.5 Reservists may, in theory, defer a call-up as part of a mobilisation for health

reasons, family circumstances, those who are undertaking certain types of study, and certain professions. However, sources report that during the 'partial' mobilisation in 2022 there were irregularities in the implementation of the exemption and deferral categories, and men who were eligible for deferral were mobilised (see [Mobilisation: reservists](#)).

- 3.3.6 There is no alternative service for conscientious objectors during a mobilisation (see [Conscientious objectors/Alternative civil service](#)).
- 3.3.7 Sources vary on the number of men who left Russia in September 2022 to avoid mobilisation, ranging from 260,000 to 700,000. Additionally, there was a steep increase in men seeking legal assistance on how to avoid the draft. There have also been reports of restrictions of movement of military personnel, with some mobilised men being prohibited from leaving their home areas and having passports refused (see [Evasion and desertion](#) and [Restrictions of movement](#)).

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3.4 Exemptions from national service (conscription)

- 3.4.1 Men who are exempt from conscription because they are unfit to do so for health reasons, have lost family members during military or able to undertake alternative civil service (ACS) are unlikely to have a well-founded fear of persecution or face a real risk of serious harm (see [General requirements for military service](#)).
- 3.4.2 The law provides for ACS for persons whom military service contradicts their convictions or religious beliefs. ACS is longer than military service: 18 months if served in the armed forces; 21 months if served in other government agencies. In practice, relatively few men undertake ACS – approximately 2,000 apply each year, of whom around 1,000 are approved. Those conscientious objectors who are refused ACS are likely to have to serve in the armed forces in some capacity (see [Conscientious objectors/Alternative civil service](#)).
- 3.4.3 Men who are exempt from military service include those who are unfit to do so for health reasons, those who have lost family members during military service and criminals. Men who have previously completed military service or ACS are also exempt from conscription but may be called-up as part of a mass mobilisation (see [Exemptions and deferrals](#) and following subsection on [Mobilisation exemptions and deferrals](#)).
- 3.4.4 Men may also defer military service because of family circumstances, those who are undertaking certain types of study, and certain professions (see [Exemptions and deferrals](#)).

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3.5 Conditions for conscripts and reservists

- 3.5.1 While credible and detailed information about the situation of conscripts and/or reservists deployed to Ukraine and elsewhere remains limited, in general the available evidence does not indicate that conditions are such that there is a real risk of serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise, each case must be considered on its facts.

- 3.5.2 Restrictions on media reporting and internet access and content has limited the available information with regard conditions and treatment of persons during serving in the armed forces (see [Limits of reporting](#)).
- 3.5.3 Sources have reported that there are incidents of abuse, torture, killings and sexual assault within the military, including ‘hazing’ – a form of initiation often involving degrading, humiliating or dangerous behaviour including physical abuses and extortion. However, the frequency and scale of such violations is unclear from the sources consulted and do not indicate it is the general situation (see [Treatment of conscripts](#) and [Conditions of military service](#)).
- 3.5.4 Salaries for conscripts are low, with a monthly allowance for conscripts ranging between £22 and £45 per month. Drafted persons under the mobilisation order are reported to receive between £1,428 and £2,117 per month. However, it is also reported that some mobilised men had not been paid salaries or received daily combat pay and, in some cases, have had to buy their own equipment such as body armour and clothing. Sources also report soldiers being short of equipment and required to buy their own gear (see [Treatment of conscripts](#)).

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3.6 Penalties for draft evasion or desertion

- 3.6.1 While credible and detailed information about conditions of conscripts and reservists deployed in Ukraine and elsewhere remains limited, in general a person who evades or deserts from armed forces is unlikely to be subject to a punishment that amounts to serious harm or persecution. The onus on the person to demonstrate otherwise, each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.6.2 Punishments for evasion and desertion are set out in the criminal code. At the start of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 draft evasion under Article 328 was punishable by a court with either a fine, compulsory labour for up to 2 years, by arrest for up to 6 months and up to 2 years in prison. Failure to receive a draft notice is punishable by a fine. However, in September 2022 President Putin approved amendments to the Criminal Code to increase penalties for evading or deserting from the military for conscripts and reservists during mobilisation or under martial law as well as during wartime conditions. These increased the punishment for unauthorised abandonment of a unit for a month or more from 5 to 10 years and for desertion from 5 to 15 years in prison (see [Evasion and desertion](#)).
- 3.6.3 According to the EUAA, between May and September 2022 there were 410 criminal cases of draft evasion brought before the courts and 564 convictions in the first half of 2022. An increase of 67 cases from the same time period in 2021. The New York Times reported that over 1,100 men were convicted of evading military service in 2022. Sources including the Danish Immigration Service and media outlets reported examples of the implementation of penalties for desertion and evasion from before and after the invasion of Ukraine (see [Evasion and desertion](#)).
- 3.6.4 The punishment for draft evasion and desertion varies depending on the circumstances in which the person avoided serving in the armed forces. Sources have reported men who have been punished for evasion and desertion, however exact data on the number and type of punishments are

not clear. Media sources reported that some conscripts have been punished for refusing to take part in fighting in Ukraine, with sentencing ranging from one year and 5 months to, in one case, 9 years, depending on their particular circumstances (see [Evasion and desertion](#)).

- 3.6.5 There have been some reports that of a limited number of cases of troops on the frontline who refused to fight being unlawfully detained and the use of blocking troops, who stop /threaten soldiers refusing to fight. However, the frequency and scale of such violations is unclear from the sources consulted and do not indicate it is the general situation (see [Evasion and desertion from conscription and mobilisation](#)).
- 3.6.6 Sources have also reported men being executed by private security groups who have employed them to fight in the war against Ukraine. There have also been reports of prisoners being pressurised into joining the recruitment drive with the threat of reprisals such as solitary confinement if they decline. However, there are claims by the Wagner private security group, operating in Ukraine, that from February 2023 prisoners were no longer being recruited (see [Prisoner recruits](#) and [Punishment for prisoners who refuse military recruitment](#)).
- 3.6.7 Conscripts and reservists who evade conscription or being mobilised, or desert from the armed forces, may face imprisonment. In the reported case of [ZB \(Russian prison conditions\) Russian Federation CG \[2004\]](#), heard 13 July 2004 and promulgated 27 August 2004, the, then, Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT) held that ‘Conditions in prisons in the Russian Federation have greatly improved since the time that gave rise to the decision of the ECtHR in Kalashnikov and in 2004 it cannot be said in general that they breach Article 3.’ (Headnote)
- 3.6.8 Current information indicates that prison conditions vary, depending on the institution and the nature of the crime the person is being punished, but are often harsh and life threatening. However, there is only limited information in the sources consulted about the specific treatment of conscripts or reservists who are imprisoned. The US State Department (USSD), Amnesty and Freedom House (FH), noted that prisons were generally overcrowded although the World Prison Brief and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) observed that the overall prison estate had an occupancy rate of only 67%. There was no information in the sources consulted on the amount of space routinely provided to prisoners (see [Prison conditions](#)).
- 3.6.9 The FCDO noted that prisoners, depending on the institution they are incarcerated, would routinely have access for food, (cold water) washing facilities, outdoor space and some healthcare. However, the USSD and FH stated that there were limits in accessing healthcare. There is no information in the sources consulted of the prevalence of disease or of the general health of prisoners. The USSD also noted that there were food shortages, inadequate sanitation, and problems in ventilation and heating. The USSD and Amnesty reported that physical and sexual abuse by guards was common, although the scale, exact nature and circumstance of such treatment are not clear from the sources consulted. Conditions were harsher for political prisoners (see [Prison conditions](#)).

3.6.10 Conditions in the prison system are reportedly poor, ill-treatment by guards and other prisoners widespread, and access to basic services restricted. However, the available evidence does not indicate that conscripts or reservists who are imprisoned will in general face treatment that exceeds the high threshold of Article 3. Therefore there are **not** very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from the IAT's conclusion in [ZB](#) that prisons generally breach Article 3.

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3.7 Acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct

3.7.1 Persons deployed to the war in Ukraine are likely to be involved in acts which maybe contrary to the basic rules of human conduct. However, at the time of writing, generally:

- conscripts are not likely to be deployed to the war in Ukraine and therefore to be involved in such acts (see [Requirement to undertake national service \(conscription\)](#))
- reservists are not likely to called up through the partial mobilisation to fight in the war in Ukraine and are therefore to be involved in such acts (see [Mobilisation system](#))

3.7.2 The onus on the person to demonstrate otherwise, each case must be considered on its facts.

3.7.3 In the Ukraine country guidance case of [PK and OS \(basic rules of human conduct\) Ukraine CG \[2020\] UKUT 00314 \(IAC\)](#), heard 3 and 4 June 2020 and promulgated on 23 November 2020, the Upper Tribunal of the Immigration and Asylum Chamber, held in regard to the basic rules of human conduct applicable generally not specifically to Ukraine that:

'a. Where a person faces punishment for a refusal to perform military service that would or might involve acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct, that is capable of amounting to "being persecuted" on grounds of political opinion for the purposes of the Refugee Convention.

'b. The term "acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct" refers to the core of humanitarian norms generally accepted between nations as necessary and applicable to protect individuals in war or armed conflict and, in particular civilians, the wounded and prisoners of war. It includes, but is not limited to, the indicative examples listed in [Krotov v Secretary of State for the Home Department \[2004\] EWCA Civ 69](#) at [30] to [36].

'c. In order to engage the Refugee Convention, the conduct in question must be committed on a systematic basis, as the result of deliberate policy or official indifference to the widespread actions of a brutal military. In practice, the term conveys an elevated threshold.

'd. It is not necessary for there to be specific international condemnation of the conflict in question for the conduct of the military to be categorised as engaging in acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct. The international community of states as a whole has already condemned conduct which is contrary to the basic rules of human conduct through its recognition of the existence of international norms from which no derogation

is possible, and through the adoption of international legal instruments recognising the prohibitions against such conduct.

'e. However, where there is specific international condemnation of such acts, that is likely to provide an evidential basis for concluding that it is reasonably likely that the military force in question is engaging in acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct on a widespread and systemic basis.

'f. The individual concerned must demonstrate that it is reasonably likely that their military service would involve the commission of acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct, or that it is reasonably likely that, by the performance of their tasks, they would provide indispensable support to the preparation or execution of such acts.

'g. The political opinion of the person concerned must be to oppose the commission of acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct. In practice, it is unlikely to be necessary for a person to adduce significant evidence that their political opinion is to oppose such conduct. It is only where there is evidence to the contrary that any real doubt is likely to arise, for example where there is evidence that the individual concerned has previously and voluntarily been responsible for acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct. Such an individual may well fall foul of the exclusion clauses in the Refugee Convention in any event.

'h. There must be no other way to avoid military service, for example through the individual concerned availing him or herself of a conscientious objector process.

'i. Where a causal link exists between the likely military role of the conscript or mobilised reservist, the commission of or participation in acts contrary to the basic rules of human conduct, and the punishment to be imposed, punishment including a fine or a non-custodial sentence will be sufficient to amount to "being persecuted" for the purposes of the Refugee Convention, provided it is more than negligible.' (Headnote)

3.7.4 A range of sources including the UN, the US State Department, and human rights groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, report that since the invasion of Ukraine Russian armed forces have committed a wide range of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in many regions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Many of these amount to war crimes and include forced deportation, forced adoptions, civilian deaths, attacks targeting Ukrainian infrastructure, displacement, sexual violence, torture and extra-judicial killings (see [Violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Ukraine](#)).

3.7.5 The International Criminal Court, which is at the time of writing was investigating acts that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine, issued an arrest warrant in March 2023 for President Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's commissioner for children's rights, for crimes committed in the war including unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children. War Crimes Watch has documented 653 events involving potential war crimes in Ukraine between February 2022 and February 2023 and

several human rights groups including the United Nations Human Rights Council enquiry have attributed a wide range war crimes and abuses, including to Russian forces in Ukraine (see [Violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Ukraine](#)).

- 3.7.6 For guidance on Article 1F see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#). For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Military Service and Conscientious Objection](#).
- 3.7.7 For further information about the impact of the war on Ukraine, see [Ukraine Country Policy and Information Notes on Security situation and Humanitarian situation](#).

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4. Protection

- 4.1.1 As the person's fear is of persecution/serious harm at the hands of the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 4.1.2 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 As the person's fear is of persecution/serious harm at the hands of the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 For further guidance on considering internal relocation and factors to be taken into account see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

About the country information

This contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [Research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content of this section follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

Decision makers must use relevant country information as the evidential basis for decisions.

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section updated: 6 July 2023

7. Limits of reporting

7.1.1 Reporters without Borders (RSF), an international NGO who provide information about press freedom worldwide¹, ranked Russia 155 out 180 countries in its press freedom index (a lower ranking equating to greater restrictions). An undated entry on RSF's Russia page stated:

'Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, almost all independent media have been banned, blocked and/or declared "foreign agents". All others are subject to military censorship.

'All privately owned independent TV channels are banned from broadcasting, except for cable entertainment channels. The Russian version of Euronews was suspended by Roskomnadzor, the media regulator, on 22 March 2022. Among the big print media outlets, which have belonged to Kremlin allies for a few years, those that had preserved their independence and were under constant threat of closure, like the independent tri-weekly Novaya Gazeta, have had to suspend their publications. Radio stations are in the same situation. Media outlets that have survived are faced with very strict self-censorship because of banned themes and words, and Western social networks are gradually being blocked.'²

7.1.2 An April 2022 EUAA COI query on the treatment of military deserters stated:

'...In correspondence with EUAA on 26 March 2022, Huseyn Aliyev, a researcher focusing on security situation developments in Central and Eastern Europe... noted that "as it could be expected from a war-time censorship, it is exceptionally difficult to obtain any reliable information at the moment. The topic of desertion is fairly sensitive for the Russian armed forces, and they are not likely to reveal that any desertion is taking place."... EUAA contacted a human rights defender for this query, who is based in Russia and works on cases of human rights violations in the country and who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons. In the correspondence with EUAA on 19 March 2022, the source noted that the information about desertion from the Armed Forces of the Russian

¹ RSF, '[Who we are](#)', no date

² RSF, '[Russia](#)' no date

Federation 'is very sensitive to the authorities in Russia.' The source reported that there was neither official data on the topic nor reporting on it by the state-controlled media, while the independent media found itself under "severe pressure" and in a situation, in which "journalists are frightened of being criminally prosecuted for 'fakes' about the Russian army" and, therefore, refraining from publishing such information...'³

7.1.3 A Freedom House report – Freedom on the Net 2022 covering developments from June 2021 to 31 May 2022 stated: 'Restrictive measures adopted after the war, such as forcing online media outlets to remove content that used words other than "special military operation" to refer to the invasion of Ukraine, and directives dictating how the media should cover the war, forced several media outlets to stop covering the war or close, and limited accessibility to dissenting viewpoints.'⁴

7.1.4 The same Freedom on the Net report stated:

'In February and March 2022, the Russian government blocked social media platforms including Twitter and Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram, which was ruled to be an "extremist organization" ...

'In addition to social media platforms, Roskomnadzor, the media regulator, and other state bodies blocked over 5,000 websites, including Ukrainian and other foreign news sites, after the start of the invasion of Ukraine... Roskomnadzor launched an unprecedented campaign against Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), blocking over 20 of them during the coverage period... Throughout the coverage period, Roskomnadzor issued escalating fines to social media platforms that refused to remove content and localize user information... Roskomnadzor compelled social media platforms, many of which suspended their Russian-based operations after the invasion of Ukraine, to remove content linked to opposition figure Aleksey Navalny, particularly around the elections in September 2021, and detained users who posted their support for his movement.'⁵

7.1.5 Similarly, Freedom House (FH) in its report covering events in 2022 noted: 'There is little transparency and accountability in the day-to-day workings of the government... Official opacity further increased after the war in Ukraine began... Russian authorities are... opaque about the war itself, providing infrequent updates on casualties and providing figures that observers believe are significant undercounts. Soldiers' relatives, meanwhile, report receiving misleading or false information about their loved ones.'⁶

7.1.6 FH also observed:

'... vague laws on extremism grant the authorities great discretion to crack down on any speech, organization, or activity that lacks official support. The government controls, directly or through state-owned companies and friendly business magnates, all national television networks and many radio and print outlets, as well as most of the media advertising market.

³ EUAA, '[Treatment of military deserters by state authorities since...](#)', (page 7-8), 5 April 2022

⁴ Freedom House, '[Freedom on the net 2022 – Russia](#)', 18 October 2022

⁵ Freedom House, '[Freedom on the net 2022 – Russia](#)', 18 October 2022

⁶ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2023 – Russia](#)', 9 March 2023

'Laws on extremism, foreign agents, and undesirable organizations have been used to harass media outlets, curtailing their access to funding and forcing many to cease operations in Russia. In 2020, the foreign agents law was expanded to apply to individuals and informal organizations. Under a measure passed by the Duma in June 2022 and enforced beginning in December, anyone "under foreign influence" or who received any type of foreign support is considered a foreign agent. Under that measure, Roskomnadzor, the federal media and telecommunications agency, can block websites classified as foreign agents at the Justice Ministry's request.

'As the war against Ukraine began, Roskomnadzor instructed outlets to only use Defense Ministry updates and to refrain from using words like "war" or "invasion" when discussing it. The government also began restricting access to a wide variety of websites, including those of domestic and foreign news outlets. Echo of Moscow, one of Russia's few remaining independent media outlets, closed that month after Roskomnadzor accused it of sharing "deliberately false" news. Later that month, after receiving a warning from Roskomnadzor, *Novaya Gazeta* said it would suspend its operations. In September, the newspaper's media license was stripped. By November, the websites of 175 domestic outlets and hundreds of foreign-based outlets were blocked.

'A series of laws require social networks to remove "illegal" content, fine websites that fail to block such content, and enforce prison sentences for online "libel," among other provisions. In March 2022, Roskomnadzor blocked access to Facebook, saying it discriminated against Russian media. Instagram was also blocked that month, after authorities said it hosted extremist content. Under criminal-code revisions passed in March, the dissemination of "false news" about the Russian military can be punished with prison terms as long as 15 years.'⁷

7.1.7 The USSD human right report covering events in 2022 stated:

'... On March 23 [2022], the Duma adopted amendments to the laws [criminalising independent war reporting and spreading false information], effectively expanding the ban on criticizing the armed forces to banning criticism of all government actions. Authorities used the new laws widely and indiscriminately to severely suppress freedom of expression, including by members of the press. Independent rights group OVD-Info reported that following the enactment of new censorship laws in March, as of December 20, authorities initiated 379 criminal cases for antiwar speech, including charges of spreading "false information" and "discrediting the military." For example, journalist for the RusNews website Maria Ponomarenko was arrested in April for "discrediting" the Russian armed forces with "fake" social media posts. Ponomarenko was held in pretrial detention following her arrest until November 14, when she was placed under house arrest. She faced up to 10 years in prison for a Telegram post concerning the March 16 Russian air strike on a theater in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol that killed hundreds of civilians.'⁸

⁷ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2023 – Russia](#)', 9 March 2023

⁸ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia](#)' (section 2), 20 March 2023

7.1.8 ACLED in its report reflecting a year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine dated 1 March 2023 noted ‘... Russian aggression against Ukraine subjected millions of Ukrainians to violence and hardship. Thousands of civilians are believed to have been killed or injured, though exact figures are hard to come by while swathes of Ukraine are still under Russian occupation. Tight informational controls in those areas do not allow for a clear understanding of the treatment of civilians.’⁹

7.1.9 The Annual Report 2023 by the partner organisations to the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, released in April 2023, noted, citing other sources:

‘In Russia, the invasion went hand in hand with a brutal crackdown on independent journalism. Shortly before the invasion, at the beginning of February, Russian authorities had banned broadcaster Deutsche Welle... Following the invasion, the authorities imposed total censorship on the coverage of the war which was officially described as a ‘special military operation’. Any deviation from the official discourse was criminalised. Independent journalists faced up to 15 years imprisonment if they did not toe the line. Crude and dehumanising propaganda, warmongering, incitement to hatred and disinformation overwhelmed Russia’s state-controlled news space...

‘After Russia’s invasion, the EU described Kremlin disinformation as an “operational tool in its assault on Ukraine and a direct threat to the Union’s public order and security”. It suspended broadcasting by RT/Russia Today and Sputnik within the EU until they “cease to conduct disinformation and information manipulation actions against the EU and its member states”...’¹⁰

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section updated: 6 July 2023

8. Demography

8.1.1 The US Bureau of the Census estimated the Russian Federation’s total population at around 141.7 million, of whom approximately 10% - around 14 million - are men aged 18 to 30¹¹.

8.1.2 Around 30% of the total population - 43.5 million – are men aged 18 to 70¹².

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section updated: 20 July 2023

9. Armed forces

9.1 Structure

9.1.1 A report by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), The Russian Federation – Military service (EUAA Military service report 2022), December 2022, citing a range of sources stated: ‘The Russian Armed Forces (RAF)

⁹ ACLED, ‘[War in Ukraine – One year on, nowhere safe](#)’, 1 March 2023

¹⁰ CofE, ‘[War in Europe and the Fight for the Right to Report](#)’ (pages 8 and 15), April 2023

¹¹ US Census Bureau, ‘[Russia](#)’, no date

¹² US Census Bureau, ‘[Russia](#)’, no date

have a hybrid structure, consisting of professional soldiers employed under term contracts and conscripts drafted for one-year compulsory military service.¹³

9.1.2 The CIA World Factbook (World Factbook 2023) provided the following details of the armed forces of the Russian Federation:

- ‘Ground Troops (Sukhoputnyye Voyskia, SV),
- ‘Navy (Voyenno-Morskoy Flot, VMF),
- ‘Aerospace Forces (Vozdushno-Kosmicheskiye Sily, VKS);
- ‘Airborne Troops (Vozdushno-Desantnyye Voyska, VDV), and;
- ‘Missile Troops of Strategic Purpose (Raketnyye Voyska Strategicheskogo Naznacheniya, RVSN) referred to commonly as Strategic Rocket Forces, are independent "combat arms," not subordinate to any of the three branches [ground troops, navy or airborne troops].
- ‘Federal National Guard Troops Service of the Russian Federation (National Guard (FSVNG), Russian Guard, or Rosgvardiya): created in 2016 as an independent agency for internal/regime security, combating terrorism and narcotics trafficking, protecting important state facilities and government personnel, and supporting border security; forces under the National Guard include the Special Purpose Mobile Units (OMON),
- ‘Special Rapid Response Detachment (SOBR), and Interior Troops (VV); these troops were originally under the command of the Interior Ministry (MVD); also nominally under the National Guard’s command are the forces of Chechen Republic head Ramzan KADYROV.
- ‘Federal Security Services (FSB): Federal Border Guard Service (includes land and maritime forces) (2022).

‘[N]ote: the Air Force and Aerospace Defense Forces were merged into the VKS in 2015; VKS responsibilities also include launching military and dual-use satellites, maintaining military satellites, and monitoring and defending against space threats.’¹⁴

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9.2 Size

9.2.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘The total size of the RAF is estimated at 1.9 million... The number of combat personnel was set at 1.013 million by a presidential decree of November 2017... On 25 August 2022, another [presidential decree was signed](#) to increase the size of the RAF from 1.9 million to 2.04 million and the size of combat personnel to 1.151 million. The decree should take effect on 1 January 2023... In its 2021 overview, the [Military Balance](#) [available in print]... estimated the actual number of RAF military personnel at 900,000... According to US-based researcher [Pavel Luzin](#)... the size of combat

¹³ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 14), December 2022

¹⁴ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Russia](#)’, (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

personnel of the RAF could be estimated at around 740,000 – 780,000 as of the beginning of 2022... By the type of service, as conveyed by the Military Balance, 280,000 servicemen were listed in the Army, 180,000 in the Command and Support, 165 000 in the Air forces, 150,000 in the Navy, 50000 in the Strategic Rocket Force, 45,000 in the Airborne forces, 29,000 in the Railway Forces, and 1,000 in the Special Operations Forces. The number of Gendarmerie and Paramilitary forces was estimated at 554,000...'¹⁵

9.2.2 The World Factbook 2023 stated:

'[P]rior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, approximately 850,000 active-duty troops (300,000 Ground Troops; 40,000 Airborne Troops; 150,000 Navy; 160,000 Aerospace Forces; 70,000 Strategic Rocket Forces; approximately 20,000 special operations forces; approximately 100,000 other uniformed personnel (command and control, cyber, support, logistics, security, etc.); estimated 200-250,000 Federal National Guard Troops (2023)

'[N]ote 1: in December 2022, the Russian Government announced a target level of 1.15 million total troops; in early 2023, it announced further plans to expand the size of the armed forces to 1.5 million but did not provide a timeline.'¹⁶

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9.3 Conscripts

9.3.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: 'Conscription has historically constituted "the main source of military manpower" of the RAF... since it is used to ensure that Russia would have a military reserve that can be used in case of a major war...'¹⁷

9.3.2 The World Factbook 2023 noted:

'The Russian military takes on about 260,000 conscripts each year in two semi-annual drafts (Spring and Fall); as of 2021, conscripts comprised an estimated 30% of the Russian military's active duty personnel and most reserve personnel were former conscripts; in April of 2019, the Russian Government pledged its intent to end conscription as part of a decade-long effort to shift from a large, conscript-based military to a smaller, more professional force... as of 2020, women made up about 5% of the active-duty military.'¹⁸

9.3.3 The EUAA report stated: 'The MoD [Ministry of Defence] notes that completing compulsory military service is a prerequisite for a career in the public sector and governmental institutions... The number of men eligible to be drafted for military service is estimated at 1.2 million each year...'¹⁹

9.3.4 An EUAA COI Query, Major developments in the Russian Federation in relation to political opposition and military service, dated 17 February 2023

¹⁵ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 14-15), December 2022

¹⁶ CIA World Factbook, '[Russia](#)', (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

¹⁷ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 15), December 2022

¹⁸ CIA World Factbook, '[Russia](#)', (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

¹⁹ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 15), December 2022

(EUAA COI query from February 2023), citing a range of sources, stated: 'Since conscription in Chechnya [a republic of Russia] resumed in the autumn 2014, it has involved only 500 young Chechens per year... conscripted only during the autumn draft... 100 to serve in the Interior Ministry forces and 400 in Russian army units in the [southern military district](#)...' ²⁰

- 9.3.5 In Chechnya the conditions of conscription are described by the EUAA military report as:

'The situation of conscription and military recruitment in Chechnya (officially, the Chechen Republic) is partly different from the rest of the Russian Federation. Conscription into obligatory military service of young Chechens was suspended after the fall of the Soviet Union... due to the armed conflict between the Chechen separatists and the Russian Federation... Following several failed attempts of conscription, especially in 2001 and 2007,... military service was reinstated in Chechnya in 2014... after an agreement between the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, and Russian MoD was reached for drafting 500 conscripts per year...' ²¹

- 9.3.6 However, Dr Pavel Luzin, a specialist in the Russian Armed Forces and a visiting scholar at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, writing in the Eurasia Daily Monitor, citing various sources in an article dated 12 June 2023, (Luzin 2023) noted:

'In 2023, regular spring conscription for military service in Russia started on April 1 and will end on July 15. The stated goal for this round of conscription is 147,000 soldiers, higher than the targets of 134,500 soldiers for spring 2022 and 120,000 soldiers for fall 2022. However, this number is comparable to the levels for 2016 and 2017, with goals of 155,000 and 142,000, respectively, during the spring conscription campaigns and 152,000 and 134,000, respectively, for the fall campaigns ([TASS](#), March 30)... For the ongoing conscription campaign, the Eastern Military District has drafted 5,500 of the planned 10,000 recruits, or 55 percent of the stated goal, while some units of the Central Military District have received more than 50 percent of the expected new recruits. Therefore, one can estimate that, in total, between 75,000 and 80,000 of the announced goal of 147,000 soldiers were conscripted during April and May 2023 ([Mil.ru](#), May 22; [Mil.ru](#), June 6).' ²²

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9.4 Contract (or professional) soldiers

- 9.4.1 Although not military service, the EUAA report explained the route to enlist with the RAF as a contract – professional - soldier:

'Contract soldiers are concentrated in the cadre and elite units, especially the airborne units...

'There are two ways to enlist in contract service with the RAF. Russian men from the age of 18 can join the ranks of contract soldiers by applying at a

²⁰ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)' (page 19), 17 February 2023

²¹ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 47), December 2022

²² Eurasia Daily Monitor, '[Tricky Recruiting in Russia: 2023 Spring Conscripts...](#)', 12 June 2023

military enlistment office ... signing a temporary contract with MoD...

‘Conscripts can sign a contract with the RAF after three months of obligatory military service...’

‘If a conscript has obtained a university degree or completed a vocational education by the time he has started obligatory military service, he can opt to enlist as a contract soldier instead of starting the obligatory one-year military service and is offered to do so by recruitment officers. ...’²³

9.4.2 The EUAA report stated:

‘Before May 2022, the age limits for signing a first contract with RAF were 18 – 40 for Russian nationals and 18 – 30 for foreign nationals...

‘... In May 2022, the State Duma approved a bill to raise the upper age limit for enlistment in the RAF on a contractual basis... Signed by the president, the new law removed the upper age limit of 40... and enabled men up to the age of 65 to enlist... As explained by Russian lawmakers, the change of the legislation was made to attract “highly professional specialists” who would use “high-precision weapons and operate weapons and military equipment” ... as well as medical personnel and engineering specialists...’²⁴

9.4.3 Luzin 2023 noted in June 2023

‘... the effort for recruiting contracted soldiers into the regular forces and volunteers into the so called “volunteer formations” has also started, instead of the expected next wave of “partial mobilization” (Garant.ru, March 7; Ura.ru, March 10). Nevertheless, in the face of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, Russia is still struggling with a severe lack of manpower, which can hardly be managed in conventional ways.

‘In an aim to recruit new contracted soldiers to fight in the war against Ukraine, the Russian Ministry of Defense even decreased the term of initial contracts from two years to one and completely eliminated the requirement of previous conscripted military service and/or professional education. Furthermore, the Ministry of Defense is trying to recruit foreign citizens. In this way, it also decreased the term of initial contracts from five years to one and made it easier for these foreign recruits to obtain Russian citizenship (Ric.mil.ru, May 10).’²⁵

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9.5 Reservists

9.5.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘There are two types of reserves (Zapas Vooruzhennyh Sil) in the Russian military system... The general reserve is defined as “inactive mobilisation reserve” or “mobilisation human resource.” ... It consists of persons who:

- ‘were discharged from the RAF and then enrolled in the reserve of the RAF;

²³ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 22), December 2022

²⁴ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 22), December 2022

²⁵ Eurasia Daily Monitor, ‘[Tricky Recruiting in Russia: 2023 Spring Conscripts...](#)’, 12 June 2023

- ‘have completed their military service or alternative civil service;
- ‘have completed studies at a military educational institution or a training at military training centers at state educational institutions;
- ‘have been exempted from military service or have obtained a deferral from military service until reaching the age of 27;
- ‘have not been subjected for military service because of reaching the age of 27; have not completed obligatory military service without having a legal basis for exemption;
- ‘women who have acquired military specialisations....

‘While the head of MoD claimed that there were 25 million people with combat experience in the RAF’s reserve, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) noted that this was a “wildly” exaggerated number...’²⁶

9.5.2 Similarly, a Danish Immigration Service (DIS) military service report of December 2022, citing other sources, stated:

‘Sergey Shoigu [Russian Minister of Defence] advised that the Russian reserve consisted of 25 million persons... Reservists are:

- ‘Previous conscripts who have completed military service;
- ‘Contract soldiers whose contract have ended...;
- ‘Graduates of military university departments;
- ‘Persons who have completed alternative civil service;
- ‘Men older than 27 years who have not served due to delays in studies, health, or without legal grounds;
- ‘Doctors, orderlies and other representatives of the so-called military registration specialties, including women;
- ‘Representatives of some professions such as communications, optics and computer technology...’²⁷

9.5.3 The following table is reproduced from the EUAA military service reports²⁸ and shows persons in the RAF’s reserve:

-	Age of Russian nationals in the RAF’s reserve		
	1 st tier	2 nd tier	3 rd tier
Soldiers, sailors, sergeants, petty officers, warrant officers and midshipmen	up to 35	up to 45	up to 50
Junior officers	Up to 50	Up to 55	Up to 60
Majors, Captains of	Up to 55	Up to 60	Up to 65

²⁶ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (pages 22 to 23), December 2022

²⁷ DIS, ‘[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)’, (page 13), December 2022

²⁸ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (pages 23), December 2022

-	Age of Russian nationals in the RAF's reserve		
	1 st tier	2 nd tier	3 rd tier
the 2 nd and 3 rd rank, Lieutenant, Colonels			
Colonels, Captains of the 1 st rank	Up to 60	Up to 65	
Superior officers	Up to 65	Up to 70	

9.5.4 However, Reuters reported on 18 July 2023:

'Russia's parliament... extended the maximum age at which men can be mobilised to serve in the army by at least five years - in the case of the highest-ranking officers, up to the age of 70.

'The law passed on [18 July]... allows men who have completed their compulsory service without any further commitment to be mobilised up to the age of 40, 50 or 55, depending on their category... In all cases the age limit was raised by five years.'²⁹

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9.6 Casualties in Ukraine

9.6.1 The US Congressional Research Service in a paper of February 2023 stated:

'... U.S estimates of Russian military losses are likely more than 100,000. In January 2023, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley stated that Russia has suffered "significantly well over 100,000"

'Russian soldiers killed and wounded. Some estimates reported in the media place Russian casualties close to 200,000.

'... UK estimates of Russian casualties have generally been comparable, if slightly higher, than those of U.S. officials. UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace in December 2022 stated Russia has suffered over 100,000 casualties.'³⁰

9.6.2 The BBC in February 2023 reported:

'Russian soldiers are dying in greater numbers in Ukraine this month than at any time since the first week of the invasion, according to Ukrainian data.

'The Ukrainian data shows 824 Russian soldiers dying per day in February.

'The figures were highlighted by the [UK's Ministry of Defence](#). The figures cannot be verified - but the UK says the trends are "likely accurate"...

'According to the Ukrainian data, highlighted by the UK, 824 Russian losses a day is more than four times the rate reported in June and July, when around 172 Russian soldiers died each day.

'The Ukrainian military claims [137,780 Russian military deaths](#) since the full-

²⁹ Reuters, '[Russia extends eligibility for military call-up by at least five years](#)', 18 July 2023

³⁰ USCRS, '[Russia's War in Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Aspects](#)' (page 10), 13 February 2023

scale invasion began.³¹

9.6.3 The Moscow Times reported in February 2023:

‘Over 15,000 Russian soldiers have been confirmed killed in Ukraine since the start of the Kremlin’s invasion, [according to](#) an independent tally published on the war’s one-year anniversary Friday.

‘The independent Mediazona news website and the BBC Russian service have been verifying the number of Russian troops killed in Ukraine using publicly available information from media reports, social networks and official statements.

‘Among the 15,136 dead servicemen identified by the investigation are more than 1,800 officers of the Russian Armed Forces, 199 of whom were in the rank of lieutenant colonel or above. They also included 1,214 reservists drafted during the autumn mobilization campaign to bolster troop numbers in Ukraine.

‘At least 1,310 Russian fighters killed in Ukraine had been prisoners recruited by the Wagner mercenary group, Mediazona said.³²

9.6.4 The Guardian in an article from February 2023 stated: ‘Hundreds of [convicts recruited into the ranks of Wagner](#), a private military company tied to the businessman [Yevgeny Prigozhin](#), have been killed or severely wounded in Ukraine, where the mercenaries have been tasked with some of Russia’s most desperate campaigns.³³

9.6.5 The Kyiv Independent, a Ukraine independent English language media outlet³⁴, reported in March 2023:

‘Using open sources, [BBC Russia](#), together with Mediazona, a Russian independent media outlet, established the names of 17,375 Russian soldiers who had been killed in the war in Ukraine. The media carry out a name-by-name count of the dead.

‘A third of all these losses included people not associated with the army before the invasion - volunteers, mobilized personnel, prisoners, and newly recruited members of private military companies. Since the beginning of 2023, at least 1,000 people who were supposed to serve their sentences in Russian prisons have been killed, according to the findings.

‘BBC and Mediazona say that according to the most conservative estimates, Russia may have lost about 35,000 people in Ukraine. At the same time, Russia’s total irretrievable losses, which include wounded, killed or missing, may amount to at least 157,500 people.³⁵

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section updated: 6 July 2023

10. Mercenaries, forced conscription and volunteers

³¹ BBC News, ‘[Russian soldier death rate highest since first week of war – Ukraine](#)’, 12 February 2023

³² The Moscow Times, ‘[Over 15,000 Russian Soldiers Confirmed Killed In...](#)’, 24 February 2023

³³ The Guardian, ‘[He’s really dangerous’: fear as Wagner convict soldiers...](#)’, 10 February 2023

³⁴ The Kyiv Independent, ‘[about](#)’, no date

³⁵ The Kyiv Independent, ‘[BBC confirms identities of 17,000 Russian soldiers...](#)’, 20 March 2023

10.1 Overview

10.1.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘As part of the general mobilisation, Russia made use of both the conventional draft and recruitment of mercenary companies such as the Wagner group... According to the Russian MoD, a military contract can be signed with Russian nationals and foreign nationals... Individuals deployed to Ukraine “as part of a private military contractor” are considered as mercenaries...

‘As of March 2022, the President Putin reportedly called on foreign volunteers to fight in Ukraine and the head of MoD indicated that 16,000 volunteers (including Chechens and mercenaries joining Wagner group from Syria and Libya...) were ready in the Middle East to fight together with RAF in Ukraine... Russia reportedly recruited mercenaries from Syria and Libya and offered each fighter between 300 and 600 dollars [around 300 – 600 EUR]. ISW cited Ukrainian intelligence reporting that following the opening of 14 recruitment centres in Syria, where mercenaries received training, Russia reportedly transferred them to Chkalovsky airbase (in Moscow region). Russia allegedly assembled “thousands” of Syrian forces (belonging to Syrian “National Defense Forces and 5th Corps”), mostly the ones “specialized in heavy artillery and sniper weapons”... As of 13 March 2022, Russian armed forces reportedly instructed its base in Hmeimim (Syria) to deploy on a daily basis up to 300 fighters from Syria to Ukraine... However, ISW reportedly has not perceived ‘any deployments of cohesive units of Syrian or Libyan fighters’, and the reported recruitments appeared to be ‘individual fighters operating under the umbrella of the Wagner Group’...

‘In April 2022, there were reportedly between 300 to 500 Syrian and Libyan mercenaries in Popasna (eastern Ukraine)... CNN cited “Andrii Yusov, a spokesperson for Ukraine’s defense intelligence agency who has been monitoring Wagner in Ukraine”, stating that as of 7 October 2022, at least 5,000 mercenaries linked to Wagner group were operating alongside the Russian armed forces in Ukraine...’³⁶

10.1.2 The same EUAA report stated:

‘During the period between July and August 2022, Russia reportedly started to recruit volunteers to be deployed in Ukraine. Volunteer battalions were to be formed in all 85 federal subjects... The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) cited Russian war correspondent and military blogger Maksim Fomin, who stated that Russia had started a “volunteer mobilization” by demanding every region to provide at least one volunteer battalion (dobrobat in Russian...). ISW further reported that volunteer battalions were formed instead of calling for a mobilisation of reservists...’³⁷

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10.2 Private military companies - mercenaries

10.2.1 A US Congressional Service ‘In focus’ note of 13 March 2023 observed:

³⁶ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 42), December 2022

³⁷ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 40), December 2022

'Russia utilizes private military companies (PMCs) to project power globally. These outfits range in size and scope and act as an unofficial (albeit nominally illegal) tool of Russian foreign policy... the most prominent Russian PMC is the Wagner Group, headed by Kremlin-connected businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin. Instead of a single entity, the Wagner Group is more of an umbrella organization for multiple entities, operations, and actors overseen by Prigozhin. During Russia's war in Ukraine since early 2022, the Wagner Group's role has increased and, in some areas, supplanted that of the Russian military.'³⁸

10.2.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: 'On 11 November 2022, the head of the Wagner Group announced that the group started training civilians in Belgorod and Kursk regions of Russia to create a militia at the border with Ukraine... The Wagner group has been present in Ukraine since 2014. As of October 2022, reportedly 1,000 of its mercenaries supported pro-Russian fighters in Luhansk and Donetsk....'³⁹

10.2.3 The World Factbook 2023 stated: '... Russia was estimated to have as many as 50,000 private military contractors fighting in Ukraine as of early 2023.'⁴⁰

10.2.4 However, the BBC report on 27 June 2023 that

'The Russian government appears to be disbanding the Wagner mercenary force.

'The defence ministry says it will claim the group's heavy weapons and military hardware.

'The move follows [a rebellion by Wagner commander Yevgeny Prigozhin](#), who marched on Moscow with an estimated 5,000 fighters, but stopped 200km short of the capital.'⁴¹

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10.3 Prisoner recruits

10.3.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources stated:

'Since spring [2022] and, on a large scale, since summer 2022,... convicts from prison facilities have been exposed to recruitment efforts by private military companies (PMCs), among them primarily the Wagner Group, Russia's largest PMC (hereafter "Wagner"),... along with a few smaller companies such as Redoubt... Following their example and approach, the Russian Ministry of Defence has begun to recruit prisoners in late September 2022, offering money and early release from prison in exchange for participation in the war in Ukraine... According to Vladimir Osechkin, founder of the human rights project Gulagu.net, Russian judges have been instructed to no longer grant parole but instead to refer the prisoners to the PMCs and the regular forces... In an interview on 21 October 2022, Olga Romanova from the prisoner advocacy organisation Russia Behind Bars

³⁸ US CRS, '[Russia's Wagner Private Military Company \(PMC\)](#)', 13 March 2023

³⁹ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 42), December 2022

⁴⁰ CIA World Factbook, '[Russia](#)', (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

⁴¹ BBC, '[What is Russia's Wagner group of mercenaries and...](#)', 27 June 2023

(RBB) estimated that a total of more than 20,000 inmates had been recruited since the beginning of the war, ... an estimate that corresponds to data from other human rights organisations...

'As of September 2022, Wagner employees alone had visited at least 44 penitentiaries across the country,... some more than once,... recruiting on average 20 % of the population of each colony affected, as estimated by RBB in August 2022... According to reports from inmates and human rights activists, Wagner is particularly interested in prisoners convicted for murder, grievous bodily harm, and robbery... Further reports indicate that the PMC also contracts inmates suffering from diseases like HIV and hepatitis C, ... the former being particularly widespread in Russian prisons,... as well as inmates holding the nationality of other CIS countries like Belarus and Tajikistan... However, certain criteria tend to disqualify for recruitment, notably advanced age,... Ukrainian citizenship,... and a conviction for terrorism or extremism... Some sources noted that persons convicted of sexual and drug offences were also recruited...

'Based on various reports from inmates and their relatives published by independent Russian media and on the Telegram channel of Gulagu.net, prisoner recruitment at Wagner usually follows a set pattern which includes the following steps: a small group of armed Wagner employees, among them on occasion the PMC's head himself, Yevgeny Prigozhin,... enters the prison (sometimes via helicopter) ... accompanied by members of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) and the FSB... During a subsequent speech by representatives of the PMC in the courtyard, prisoners are offered a military service contract with the company and demanded to 'defend the motherland' in return for which they are promised a monthly salary ... and a presidential pardon after six months of service. Those who volunteer have to pass a personal interview, i.e., about their motivation to go to war, a physical fitness test and a polygraph test to assess their political attitude and inclination to desert... After the selection process, admitted prisoners are separated from their fellow inmates... RBB noted that their lawyers were not allowed to visit persons they knew had been drafted. The drafted convicts were reportedly transferred to the Rostov region... Rostov's penal colony IK-2 has reportedly been converted into a military training camp for recruited convicts...' ⁴²

10.3.2 The same EUAA report stated:

'Compared to Wagner, fewer details are known about the recruitment campaign of the MoD, which was not launched until late September 2022. Depending on the source, the ministry mainly... or exclusively... recruits in so-called "red" penal colonies, where former members of the law enforcement and security agencies serve their sentences... As of 2020, there were 21 such colonies in Russia... The prisoners are offered a six-month contract with the ministry and afterwards a presidential pardon if they join the Storm battalion, a newly created unit of enlisted convicts...' ⁴³

10.3.3 The EUAA report 2022 noted that prisoner recruits at Wagner: '... are

⁴² EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 45-46), December 2022

⁴³ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 46), December 2022

offered a military service contract with the company and demanded to 'defend the motherland' in return for which they are promised a monthly salary of 100,000 to 200,000 roubles [1,058 – 2,117 GBP⁴⁴] (plus a compensation of 5 million roubles [52,933 GBP⁴⁵] for their families in case of death) and a presidential pardon after six months of service.'⁴⁶

10.3.4 The DIS military service report stated:

'According to Novaya Gazeta, the aim of the amendments to the law on mobilisation are legalising the presence of thousands of convicts that already have been recruited and sent to Ukraine, primarily for the private military companies (PMC). Most notorious is the Wagner Military Company, but also the group PMC Redoubt and the Storm Squadron have been recruiting among prisoners... Instead of fighting for the private companies where the conditions for recruited convicts often are cruel and lethal, the new law will make them able to join the regular Russian military...'⁴⁷

10.3.5 An online article by CNN, updated in February 2023 stated:

'For months, Russia has been using the shadowy [private mercenary company Wagner](#) to bolster its frontline presence with prisoners – a scheme at first [denied and secretive](#), but then openly promoted by Wagner's owner, Yevgeny Prigozhin.

'On Thursday [9 February 2023⁴⁸], Prigozhin announced that Wagner had stopped recruiting convicts to fight in Ukraine, saying: "We have completely discontinued the recruitment of prisoners into Wagner PMC. To those who work for us currently, all obligations are being fulfilled." No reason was given for the decision and CNN cannot independently confirm the claims.'⁴⁹

10.3.6 The same CNN article continued:

'... several prisoners CNN has spoken to seem to indicate a disturbing new strategy. They say they were directly employed by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

'A Ukrainian intelligence official confirmed to CNN that prisoners recently captured by Ukrainian forces had said they were directly employed by the ministry.

"They emphasize to us that they are not Wagner, that they were invited officially by the defense ministry," Andriy Usov, representative for defense intelligence, at the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, told CNN.'⁵⁰

10.3.7 The USSD's human rights report covering events in 2022 noted: 'There were widespread reports that authorities and the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group recruited inmates from Russia's prisons for the country's ongoing war in Ukraine. Civil rights organization Russia Behind Bars estimated that, as of December, approximately 42,000 inmates had already been sent to fight in

⁴⁴Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

⁴⁵Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

⁴⁶EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 44), December 2022

⁴⁷DIS, '[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)' (page 26), December 2022

⁴⁸Reuters, '[Russia's Wagner mercenaries halt prisoner recruitment campaign](#)', 9 February 2023

⁴⁹CNN, '[Russian convicts say defense ministry is sending them from...](#)', updated 15 February 2023

⁵⁰CNN, '[Russian convicts say defense ministry is sending them from...](#)', updated 15 February 2023

Ukraine.⁵¹

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10.4 Volunteer battalions

10.4.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘During the period between July and August 2022, Russia reportedly started to recruit volunteers to be deployed in Ukraine. Volunteer battalions were to be formed in all 85 federal subjects... The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) cited Russian war correspondent and military blogger Maksim Fomin, who stated that Russia had started a ‘volunteer mobilization’ by demanding every region to provide at least one volunteer battalion ... ISW further reported that volunteer battalions were formed instead of calling for a mobilisation of reservists... According to Nikolai Petrov, senior Research Fellow at Russia and Eurasia Programme of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, ‘volunteer battalions’ started to be established since April and May 2022 throughout Russia... As of 8 August 2022, over 40 volunteer battalions within 20 regions had been established. In some areas the process was at recruiting level while in other areas the recruited individuals were at training phase or ‘unit cohesion’ and in other areas the recruited individuals were already deployed into combat zone...’⁵²

10.4.2 The same report stated:

‘Regional officers reportedly recruited men aged up to 50 (or 60 for separate military specialties), ...who were contracted for a duration of six months and being offered an average monthly salary of 220,000 to 350,000 roubles [around 2,328 to 3,703 GBP⁵³]. In addition, separate subjects offered an immediate recruitment bonus of an average 200,000 roubles [2,117 GBP⁵⁴], which was provided ‘from the region’s budget and social benefits for the servicemen and their families’... A Russian volunteer from Tatarstan who had reportedly returned from the Ukraine war indicated that volunteer fighters were paid 205,000 roubles [2,169 GBP⁵⁵] per month. According to him, they were not paid their daily combat pay of 8,000 roubles [84 GBP⁵⁶] per day...’⁵⁷

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10.5 Chechen groups

10.5.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘Chechen groups have been fighting in Ukraine since the start of the war in February 2022... and the Chechen leader later revealed the formation of four additional battalions (namely North-Akhmat, South-Akhmat, West-Akhmat and East-Akhmat)... At least 1,200 Chechen fighters (known as Kadyrovtsy or Kadyrovites) were deployed to Ukraine in late February [2022]... and ‘two

⁵¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Russia](#)’ (section 1c), 20 March 2023

⁵² EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 40), December 2022

⁵³ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

⁵⁴ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

⁵⁵ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

⁵⁶ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

⁵⁷ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 40), December 2022

Chechen divisions of Russian Guard' in September 2022...'⁵⁸

10.5.2 With regard forced conscription of Chechynan troops the EUAA military service report stated:

'During the reference period [24 February 2022 – 15 November 2022], media sources, human rights activists and bloggers — referring to the statements of Chechen men and their relatives — have reported on numerous instances of forced recruitment... The methods used for forced recruitment included inducement, ... threats,... and kidnapping.... The Europe-based human rights NGO Vaifond, reported in May 2022 that, among the people who were forced to volunteer, were people with disabilities as well as people who had no previous connection to the state- or low enforcement-bodies. According to the source, some civil servants were also forced to apply to join the volunteer battalions.... During the same month, Kavkaz.Realii reported that, based on the information of the opposition movement 1ADAT, around 130 people were kidnapped and detained to force them to volunteer for the units... On 15 June, an independent media outlet The Insider, reported that a brother of a Chechen opposition blogger Khasan Khalitov was abducted by the Chechen security forces and taken to Ukraine... In some instances, men were reported to have had to pay a high ransom to avoid recruitment... or to choose between signing a contract to be deployed to Ukraine and facing made-up criminal proceedings...'⁵⁹

10.5.3 A February 2023 EUAA COI response, citing a number of sources, stated:

'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 [...2,133 to 5,334 GBP⁶⁰] 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.”...'⁶¹

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section updated: 6 July 2023

11. **Conscription: general requirements**

11.1 Law

11.1.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'According to Article 59 of the Constitution, all Russian citizens have “a duty and obligation” to defend the country. The same Article stipulates that every citizen is obliged to “carry out military service according to the federal law.” The right to alternative civil service is guaranteed by paragraph 3 of the same Article and the way of its realisation is set to be regulated by the

⁵⁸ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 40), December 2022

⁵⁹ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 52), December 2022

⁶⁰ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 23 March 2023

⁶¹ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)' (page ?), 17 February 2023

federal law...'⁶²

11.1.2 The online newspaper, Meduza, reported on 23 May 2023 'Russia's State Duma approved an amendment to a law on the procedure for entering and departing Russia that requires those conscripted into military or alternative civilian service to hand over their passports. According to the amendment, passports must be handed over to the Russian authorities within five days of receiving the conscription notice.'⁶³

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11.2 Length of service, age and nationality

11.2.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: 'One-year military service is compulsory for all Russian men aged 18 – 27.'⁶⁴

11.2.2 The CIA World Factbook stated that as of 2022 the regulation for military service in respect of age was:

- '18-27 years of age for compulsory service for men;
- '18-40 for voluntary/contractual service;
- 'women and non-Russian citizens (18-30) may volunteer;
- 'men are registered for the draft at 17 years of age;
- '12-month service obligation (Russia offers the option of serving on a 24-month contract instead of completing a 12-month conscription period);
- 'reserve obligation for non-officers to age 50; enrollment in military schools from the age of 16...
- '...in May 2022, Russia's parliament approved a law removing the upper age limit for contractual service in the military.'⁶⁵

11.2.3 The CIA World Factbook further noted:

'[I]n November 2022, President Vladimir PUTIN signed a decree allowing dual-national Russians and those with permanent residency status in foreign countries to be drafted into the army for military service...

'[S]ince 2015, foreigners 18-30 with a good command of Russian have been allowed to join the military on 5-year contracts and become eligible for Russian citizenship after serving 3 years; in October 2022, the Interior Ministry opened up recruitment centers for foreigners to sign a 1-year service contract with the armed forces, other troops, or military formations participating in the invasion of Ukraine with the promise of simplifying the process of obtaining Russian citizenship'⁶⁶

11.2.4 Reuters reported in January 2023: 'Russia could raise the upper age limit for citizens to be conscripted into the armed forces as soon as this spring, a senior lawmaker has said, as part of Moscow's plans to boost the number of Russian troops by 30%. 'President Vladimir Putin gave his [backing](#) in

⁶² EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 15), December 2022

⁶³ Meduza, '[Russian State Duma approves amendment...](#)', 23 May 2023

⁶⁴ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 15), December 2022

⁶⁵ CIA World Factbook, '[Russia](#)', (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

⁶⁶ CIA World Factbook, '[Russia](#)', (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

December to defence ministry proposals to raise the age range for mandatory military service to cover Russian citizens aged 21-30, rather than the current range of 18-27.⁶⁷

- 11.2.5 Similarly, an EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘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... 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.”... As noted by independent media outlet Meduza, the change of the conscription age would enable MoD to bolster its “conscript resources” as many young men use their studies to get a deferral from military service...’⁶⁸

- 11.2.6 The Moscow Times, an online independent media outlet which has since the invasion of Ukraine and legislation on ‘fake news’ relocated journalists abroad⁶⁹, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a non-profit International news platform with headquarters in Prague⁷⁰ reported from March 2023 that a bill had been submitted by Russian law makers to Parliament, extending the upper end of the draft age for conscription for military service from 27 to 30 years. The bill also gradually raises the minimum conscription age from 18 years old to 19 in 2024, 20 in 2025 and finally to 21 in 2026^{71 72}.

- 11.2.7 The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs Country of origin information report – Russian Federation covering events between April 2021 and March 2023 (Dutch MFA report 2023), citing various sources, noted:

‘All Russian men between 18 and 27 years old and 16 or 17 year-olds who have been trained at a military school are conscripted. At the end of December 2022, the Ministry of Defence proposed raising the age for military service from 18-27 years to 21-30 years. This legislative amendment was submitted to the State Duma on 13 March 2023 but had not yet been processed by 31 March 2023 so will not affect the draft in the spring of 2023.254 Completion of military service is required in order to work in the public sector.255’⁷³

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11.3 Draft process

- 11.3.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘Article 31 of the Federal Law on Military Duty and Military Service requires that a draft notice is handed in person and that a person must sign for it

⁶⁷ Reuters, ‘[Russia could expand draft age as soon as this spring, lawmaker says](#)’, 12 January 2023

⁶⁸ EUAA, ‘[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)’ (page 10), 17 February 2023

⁶⁹ Moscow Times, [About us](#), no date

⁷⁰ RFE/RL, [About us](#)’, no date

⁷¹ The Moscow Times, ‘[Russian Lawmakers Introduce Bill Raising Draft Age](#)’, 14 March 2023

⁷² RFE/RL, ‘[Bill Submitted To Russian Lawmakers Raising Draft Age to 21 Years Old](#)’, 13 March 2023

⁷³ Dutch MFA, ‘[Country of origin information report – Russian Federation](#)’ (page 39), 31 March 2023

upon receipt... After receiving the draft notice, the person is obliged to report to the military recruitment office, where he must undergo a medical commission [assessment]. If proven fit for military service, the person must present himself at a recruitment commission, whose role is to decide whether he will be conscripted, granted exemption or deferral from military service, or admitted to the reserve (zapas). If the commission decides that the person will be conscripted, he will be notified about the location of his military service. The recruitment commission also decides on requests to serve alternative civil service...

'... around half [of the 1.2 million men eligible to be drafted] ... receives a draft notice requiring them to present themselves at a local military recruitment office...' ⁷⁴

11.3.2 The same EUAA report stated:

'Prior to conscription into obligatory military service, young men aged 16 – 17 undergo an initial military registration, which is carried out by military recruitment offices. As stated by MoD, the purpose of the initial registration is "to identify the number of pre-conscripts and define if they are medically fit for military service" as well as to evaluate their level of education for further education or training. During the medical examination, pre-conscripts are assigned categories defining their physical and psychological fitness for military service...

'According to the law, Russian men aged 18 – 27 who are subject to statutory military service must notify their local military recruitment office about the place of their residence... Military recruitment officers were reported to have regularly visited homes (official addresses where a person is registered) and workplaces of reservists...' ⁷⁵

11.3.3 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'... As stipulated by Article 25 of the Federal Law on Military Duty and Military Service, the military draft is organised upon a presidential order and is carried out semi-annually: between 1 April and 15 July and between 1 October and 31 December. Three groups of Russian nationals have different conscription periods: residents of the Far North or certain areas equated to the Far North (from 1 May to 15 July and from 1 November to 31 December), conscripts living in rural areas and engaged in sowing or harvesting works (only fall conscription with the dates from 15 October to 31 December is carried out), and teaching staff (conscription is organised only in spring, between 1 May and 15 June)...' ⁷⁶

11.3.4 The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO), an international body which acts as an umbrella organisation for national associations of conscientious objectors ⁷⁷, noted in its annual report for 2022, citing the Russian anti-war NGO, [Movement of conscientious objectors](#), claimed

'In April 2023, the State Duma passed amendments legalizing electronic

⁷⁴ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 15, 16), December 2022

⁷⁵ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 15), December 2022

⁷⁶ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 15, 16), December 2022

⁷⁷ ECBO, '[About ECBO](#)', no date

summonses for conscription through a personal account on "Gosuslugi." While this could streamline mobilization, it raises concerns about citizens' rights and freedom of movement restrictions. Penalties for failing to report to the recruitment center on the specified day are severe, with consequences potentially affecting an individual's future ability to support themselves and their families.⁷⁸

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11.4 Conscription since 2022

11.4.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'The number of conscripts to be drafted for military service in 2022 was set at 254,000,80 which is the lowest in the last ten years and 7,150 persons less than in 2021...

'On 31 March 2022, President Putin signed a decree ordering the spring draft to be conducted between 1 April and 15 July and stipulating that 134,000 conscripts would be drafted during the exercise... The MoD underlined that the spring conscription was not related to the special operation in Ukraine and that the conscripted men would not be sent to any "hot spots"... which is a reported euphemism for the armed conflict in Ukraine... By 11 July [2022], 89,000 conscripts were reportedly assigned to their military units...

'On 30 September 2022, Putin signed a decree to start the autumn conscription to draft 120,000 men. The conscription was set to take place from 1 November to 31 December... The autumn draft started one month later than usual due to the "partial mobilisation"... which was officially held between 21 September and 31 October 2022... Similarly to the spring campaign, MoD said that the draft was not "in any way related to the special operation."... The General Staff of the RAF, said that conscripts would not be used in hostilities in Ukraine and "the conscripts that are discharged upon the end of their service will be sent home."... According to the law, residents of 24 municipalities across five regions in Russia – Yakutia, Chukotka, Transbaikal, Kamchatka and Khabarovsk territories – are drafted only in the spring draft. According to the authorities, there would be no conscription in the occupied DNR [self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic], LNR [self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic], Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions [of Ukraine]... As of 27 November 2022, no information that the persons in abovementioned occupied regions would be still drafted under semi-annual conscription was found. In a separate process, self-appointed leaders of DNR and LNR have ordered mobilisation of their population on 19 February 2022...'⁷⁹

11.4.2 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:

'The autumn conscription of 2022 was delayed by a month due to "partial mobilisation,"... ordered by President Putin on 21 September 2022... Military recruitment commissions started their work on 1 November. The deployment of the recruits from assembly points (sborny punkt) to military units began on

⁷⁸ ECBO, '[Annual Report – Conscientious Objection to Military Service...](#)' (page 67), 12 May 2023

⁷⁹ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 18-19), December 2022

15 November... 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...'⁸⁰

11.4.3 The Dutch MFA report 2023 noted:

'Conscripts are called up twice a year: in spring between 1 April and 15 July and in autumn between 1 October and 31 December, for military service lasting twelve months.²⁵⁶ In the spring of 2022, 134,500 men started their military service. In the autumn of 2022, the start date for the recruitment of conscripts was moved from 1 October to 1 November.²⁵⁷ Presumably this was aimed at relieving the regional military recruitment offices²⁵⁸ due to the mobilisation that was taking place at that time. In the autumn call-up, 120,000 conscripts started their military service. These numbers are lower than in previous years.²⁵⁹ For the spring call-up from 1 April 2023, President Putin announced on 30 March 2023 that he would call up 147,000 conscripts.²⁶⁰⁸¹

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section updated: 6 July 2023

12. Conscription: exemptions and deferrals

12.1 Law

12.1.1 The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (MOD-RF) webpage in an undated entry on draft exemptions stated: 'Russian laws include a number of provisions outlining the reasons for draft exemption and military service deterrents [deferments]. Draft exemption is a legitimate reason to cancel a citizen's obligation for compulsory military service.'⁸²

12.1.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

- 'The reasons for draft exemption are defined by Article 23 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service of 1998...
- 'Deferral conditions are stipulated in Article 24 of the Law on Military Duty and Military Service of 1998.'⁸³

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12.2 Previously completed military or alternative civilian service

12.2.1 The MOD-RF webpage on draft exemption and deterrents stated: 'According to current laws, a citizen is exempt from conscription (draft) if such citizen has previously completed military or alternative civilian service.'⁸⁴

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12.3 Medical

12.3.1 The MOD-RF webpage on draft exemption and deferments provided the

⁸⁰ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)' (page 9), 17 February 2023

⁸¹ Dutch MFA, '[Country of origin information report – Russian Federation](#)' (page 40), 31 March 2023

⁸² MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

⁸³ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 19), December 2022

⁸⁴ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

following information: 'According to current laws, a citizen is exempt from conscription (draft) if... the medical board has found such citizen unfit for military service (or fit for limited service).'⁸⁵ The same MOD-RF page also provided a [list of medical illnesses](#) that disqualify a person from entry to military service.

12.3.2 The MOD-RF webpage also stated that deferment can be used in cases where a person '[i]s found temporarily (up to one year) unfit for military service for medical reasons.'⁸⁶

12.3.3 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'There is a list of medical illnesses that disqualify a person from entry to military service... The list is a part of a regulation on army medical examination of 4 July 2013. Based on the assigned category, which is designated by the first five letters of the Cyrillic alphabet (А, Б, В, Г, Д)... some of the listed medical conditions exempt the person from military service and others limit the person's military duty to service in a certain branch of military forces or give a temporary exemption...'⁸⁷

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12.4 Family circumstances

12.4.1 The MOD-RF webpage on draft exemption and deferments provided the following information: '... a citizen may enjoy the right of draft exemption if such citizen's father or blood brother has died in the course of their military service.'⁸⁸

12.4.2 The same MOD-RF webpage also gave the following reasons that a person can use to defer military duty:

- 'Is permanently involved in nursing, assisting and custody over an incapacitated relative (based on a statement provided by a federal medical and social inspectorate at the place of residence of citizens conscripted to the armed forces) who does not enjoy full government support;
- 'Is a permanent custodian or guardian of an underage blood brother or sister;
- 'Is a single father;
- 'Has two or more children;
- 'Has a disabled child up to three years old;
- 'Has a child and a wife whose pregnancy period is over 25 weeks...'⁸⁹

12.4.3 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:

'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

⁸⁵ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

⁸⁶ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

⁸⁷ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 19), December 2022

⁸⁸ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

⁸⁹ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

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... A local online newspaper Chita.ru reported that a military commissar of Zabaikalsky region confirmed the cancellation of the deferral in December... 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...’⁹⁰

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12.5 Specific professions

12.5.1 The MOD-RF webpage stated that deferment can be used in cases where a person:

- ‘Is currently employed by a public agency or organization that provide determent from conscription-based military service;
- ‘Has been elected a representative in the State Duma, legislative or representative government bodies or head of a municipal entity (determent is granted for the duration of service in the above organizations);
- ‘Is registered as an office seeker at a federal or local government body (determent is granted through the date of official release of election results or, in case of early withdrawal – through the date of withdrawal).’⁹¹

12.5.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources stated: ‘Employment with certain institutions can also provide a ground for deferral from military service. These institutions comprise the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Fire Service, law enforcement agencies, customs authorities, and Rosgvardia.’⁹²

12.5.3 The same EUAA report, citing various sources, stated:

‘In March 2022, a deferral from statutory military service was granted to IT specialists... who have a university degree in such fields as mathematics, computer science, physics, etc., are employed full-time, and have worked in the profession at least for 11 months or had started to work within 1 year after completion of studies. The employer must submit the documents about the employment to the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications, and Mass Media, which then forwards them to MoD... This deferral was granted under the governmental regulation of 28 March [2022] which was issued in compliance with the presidential order [informal translation] “On measures to ensure the accelerated development of the information technology industry in the Russian Federation.”...’⁹³

⁹⁰ EUAA, ‘[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)’ (page 17), 17 February 2023

⁹¹ MOD-RF, ‘[Draft exemption and determents](#)’, no date

⁹² EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 20), December 2022

⁹³ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 20), December 2022

12.6 Education

12.6.1 The MOD-RF webpage on draft exemption and deterrents provided the following information: 'Draft exemption also applies to individuals with an academic degree...' ⁹⁴

12.6.2 The same MOD-RF webpage stated that a person may use the right of deferment in cases where that person:

- 'Is a school or gymnasium student (under 20 years old), a full-time student at a basic or secondary vocational education institution (under 20 years old and having finished secondary education) or a full-time university student (determent is granted for the length of learning at the university, not to exceed the standard length of time required to master basic curriculum), provided the educational institution has been certified by the state educational authority;
- 'Is a full-time postgraduate student at a state-certified educational institution or research institution (determent is granted for the length of learning, not to exceed the standard length of time required to master basic curriculum, and for the length of time required to defend a thesis paper, not to exceed one year after completion of the learning process);... ⁹⁵

12.6.3 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources stated: 'Many young men use study de[f]erments... exemptions to avoid military service...' ⁹⁶

12.7 Criminals

12.7.1 The MOD-RF webpage on draft exemption and deterrents provided the following information: 'Draft exemption also applies to... perpetrators of crime who are currently serving their sentence or have an outstanding conviction, as well as perpetrators currently under investigation.' ⁹⁷

12.7.2 However, sources report that since summer 2022 prisoners were recruited into the military and sent to the Ukraine (see [Eligibility for mobilisation](#) and [Prisoner recruits](#)).

12.8 Miscellaneous

12.8.1 The same MOD-RF webpage stated that a person may use the right of deferment in cases where that person: 'Has been granted such right by virtue of decrees of the President of the Russian Federation.' ⁹⁸

⁹⁴ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

⁹⁵ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

⁹⁶ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)' (page 10), 17 February 2023

⁹⁷ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

⁹⁸ MOD-RF, '[Draft exemption and deterrents](#)', no date

13. Conscription: conscientious objectors

13.1 Law

13.1.1 The Russian MoD website in an undated entry referred to the law describing alternative service:

"Alternative civil service is a special kind of work in the interests of the society and state, carried by citizens instead of military service".

"The Federal Law "On Alternative Civil Service[ACS]", Article 1, Part 1, extraction.

"A citizen of the Russian Federation in the event that his convictions or religious belief contradict military service has the right to substitute alternative civilian service. "

'The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 59, Part 3, extraction'⁹⁹.

13.1.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'Conscientious objectors have a right to substitute active military service with alternative civil service (alternativnaya grazhdanskaya sluzhba, AGS). ... This right is stipulated by Article 59.3 of the Russian Constitution and is applied if a person's "convictions or religious beliefs contradict military service"... or "in other cases envisaged by the federal law."... The right to substitute military service with alternative civil service is also applicable to young men from small indigenous ethnic minorities who pursue a traditional way of life... Alternative civil service is regulated by the Federal Law "On Alternative Civil Service."... '¹⁰⁰

13.1.3 The ECBO noted in its annual report for 2022 that 'Persons serving in the military, whether as conscripts or professional soldiers, cannot apply for conscientious objection.'¹⁰¹

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13.2 Length of service

13.2.1 The MOD-RF website noted:

'Since 1 January 2008, the AGS term for citizens sent to serve under its conditions amounts:

- '21 months – for citizens, who perform AGS at organizations subordinate to the federal bodies of executive power as well as the bodies of executive power of Subjects of the Russian Federation;
- '18 months – for citizens, who perform AGS at organizations of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other Forces, military formations and bodies, as civilian personnel employees.'¹⁰²

13.2.2 EUAA report noted: '... The period of alternative civil service is either 18 or

⁹⁹ MOD-RF, '[Alternative service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation](#)', no date

¹⁰⁰ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 17), December 2022

¹⁰¹ ECBO, '[Annual Report – Conscientious Objection to Military Service...](#)' (page 61), 12 May 2023

¹⁰² MOD-RF, '[Alternative service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation](#)', no date

21 months, depending on the profile of the organisation where it is performed. ... As explained by MoD, 18-month service is applied if a person is engaged as civilian personnel at the RAF or other military institutions...'¹⁰³

- 13.2.3 The CIA World Factbook noted: '[A]n existing law allows for a 21-month alternative civil service for conscripts in hospitals, nursing homes and other facilities for those who view military duty as incompatible with their beliefs, but military conscription offices reportedly often broadly ignore requests for such service.'¹⁰⁴

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13.3 Process to apply for ACS/AGS

13.3.1 The MOD-RF website stated that the ACS

'... is regulated by Federal Law "On Alternative Civil Service". The scheme of sending citizens to alternative civil service is as follows:

- 'Citizens should file an application for replacement of military service with ACS to the military commissariat, and the draught commission should make a decision on the basis of the application;
- 'Military Commissar sends a citizen to the place of his ACS in accordance with the Plan of Direction, approved by the Federal Service for Labour and Employment;
- 'Citizens, who have chosen ACS, may occupy only those positions and only in those organisations, which are contained in the official list approved annually by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Development;
- 'labour activities of citizens doing alternative civil service are regulated by the Labour Code of the Russian Federation.'¹⁰⁵

13.3.2 The EUAA report stated:

'A person who wants to choose alternative service on the grounds of religious beliefs or personal convictions must follow a bureaucratic procedure ... which consists of a written application, substantiated by documentation and/or witness statements... As noted by Sergey Krivenko, the head of the human rights group Citizen. Army. Law., in his interview with the [Danish Immigration Service \(DIS\) in May 2022](#), the right to apply for alternative service is used only during enlistment and it does not apply to people already undergoing military service.'¹⁰⁶

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13.4 Access to ACS/AGS

13.4.1 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:

'Sources giving legal advice to future conscripts noted that it was difficult to substitute military service with alternative civil service. The application to a

¹⁰³ EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 17), December 2022

¹⁰⁴ CIA World Factbook, ['Russia'](#), (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

¹⁰⁵ MOD-RF, ['Alternative service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation'](#), no date

¹⁰⁶ EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 17), December 2022

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...

'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...

'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 religious affiliation should be proven with additional documents (certificate of membership, testimonies of other members) and the membership should be long-lasting...'¹⁰⁷

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13.5 ACS/AGS in practice

- 13.5.1 RFERL in article dated 11 March 2020: 'According to the Defence Ministry, about 2,000 people apply for alternative civilian service each year and about half of them are approved.'¹⁰⁸
- 13.5.2 The EUAA report stated: 'According to the statistics of the [Federal Service of Labour and Employment](#), 1,152 young men were enrolled in alternative civil service as of 1 February 2022.'¹⁰⁹
- 13.5.3 The ECBO annual report 2021, published March 2022, noted: 'NGO's cannot estimate the total number of applications for ACS [alternative civil service] and the officials don't publish this information.'¹¹⁰ While, the ECBO's annual report for 2022, citing a Russian NGO, [Movement of conscientious objectors](#), claimed that 'in 50% of cases people are denied ACS.'¹¹¹
- 13.5.4 The Dutch MFA report 2023, citing various sources, observed:
- 'In practice, it is not always possible to opt for alternative military service. No accurate independent figures on the success rate are available. Prior to the war, there were only around 2,000 requests for alternative military service annually, according to the Russian Ministry of Defence.³⁰⁴ Around 140,000 conscripts complete their military service every year. Alternative military service is not possible in all regions because there are no locations or organisations where this can be done.³⁰
- 'On 15 November 2022, the Mobilisation Preparation Law was amended, allowing conscripts who take part in alternative military service to be transferred to military units in a position that does not involve bearing, keeping or using arms.³⁰⁶

¹⁰⁷ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)' (page 11), 17 February 2023

¹⁰⁸ RFERL, '[Shoveling NATO's S***: A Russian Pacifist's Three-Year Fight...](#)', 11 March 2020

¹⁰⁹ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 21), December 2022

¹¹⁰ ECBO, '[Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2021](#)' (page 54), 21 March 2022

¹¹¹ ECBO, '[Annual Report – Conscientious Objection to Military Service...](#)' (page 61), 12 May 2023

‘According to the Russian Ministry of Defence, 98% of requests for alternative military service were granted in the years from 2014 to 2017.³⁰⁷ NGOs reported that alternative military service was rejected in half of the cases in Saint Petersburg during the same period. ³⁰⁸ A more recent article quoted the Department of Defence as reporting a rejection rate of approximately 50% of its 2,000 applications annually.³⁰⁹ One source noted that the rejection rate prior to the war in Ukraine was very low, as recruitment offices preferred to simply ignore applicants and not have them do military service. According to this source, that is no longer the case, but the figures are still not available.³¹⁰ This information could not be verified with other sources. News website Meduza also reports that applicants for alternative military service are discouraged by the recruitment office by means of threats and intimidation.³¹¹

‘It is difficult to estimate the number of requests and therefore the percentage of rejections because not everybody is invited to appear before the Commission for alternative military service due to administrative defects in the application procedure.³¹² The application procedure is described by one lawyer as bureaucratically complicated and designed to discourage alternative military service.³¹³ In addition, it is said that applicants for alternative military service are humiliated and threatened by the military commission in order to discourage them. There is also said to be a high degree of arbitrariness in the allocation or rejection of requests for alternative military service.³¹⁴

‘If the committee decides to reject the application, the applicant can appeal to the court.³¹⁵ No official or reliable success rates are available for these types of proceedings. In 2021, one NGO estimated that the success rate was around 25% and that in the other cases the court made military service compulsory.³¹⁶¹¹²

13.5.5 The New York Times reported in an article dated 30 April 2023 that ‘In theory, Russian law allows for conscientious objectors’ performing alternative service, but it is rarely granted. Sometimes those charged with refusing to fight are given suspended sentences, which means they can be redeployed.’¹¹³

13.5.6 For information about ACS under the partial (or general) mobilisation, see [Mobilisation of reservists/Alternative civilian service](#).

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14. Conscripts: treatment

14.1 Training

14.1.1 The EUAA Military service report 2022, citing a range of sources, stated: ‘After being drafted, conscripts receive a one- to two-month basic training, followed by advance training lasting from three to six months, after which they are sent to their designated units...’¹¹⁴

14.1.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: ‘Not all

¹¹² Dutch MFA, ‘[Country of origin information report – Russia...](#)’ (pages 45 to 46), 31 March 2023

¹¹³ NYT, ‘[They Refused to Fight for Russia. The Law Did Not Treat Them Kindly](#)’, 30 April 2023

¹¹⁴ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 17), December 2022

conscripted young men are assigned directly to the armed forces, with some sent to serve at Rosgvardia or the Ministry of Emergency Situations... The number of conscripts varies according to the type of service and units... but they constitute about a quarter of the Special Forces (spetsnaz)...¹¹⁵

- 14.1.3 A DIS report which provides an update on military service since July 2022, and citing a variety of sources, stated:

‘Pursuant to Russian law, it is illegal to deploy conscripts to combat areas abroad if the conscripts have less than four months of training... War and martial law, however, allow Russia to send conscripts to combat zones before the conscripts have completed four months of training. Given that President Putin declared martial law of varying degrees of urgency in Russia, authorities can use conscripts in the war in Ukraine without the otherwise mandatory four months of training... The annexation of four Ukrainian regions also means that conscripts can participate in the war... as Russian law does not prohibit the use of conscripts on Russian territory. In this situation, it does not matter how many months of training the conscripts have completed...¹¹⁶

- 14.1.4 The Evening Standard in November 2022 reported new Russian troops being sent to the frontline with little or no training (although it is not clear these were conscripts or contract soldiers)¹¹⁷.

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14.2 Deployment to Ukraine

- 14.2.1 The UK Ministry of Defence periodically post on ‘Twitter’ [defence intelligence updates](#) along with images showing Russian attacks and troop locations within the Ukraine.

- 14.2.2 The World Factbook noted: ‘[I]n February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine with an estimated 150,000 troops; prior to the invasion, it maintained an estimated 30,000 troops in areas of Ukraine occupied since 2014.’¹¹⁸

- 14.2.3 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘The current legislation of the Russian Federation allows the deployment of conscripts to armed conflict zones after they complete four months of military training... This is stipulated by Article 2.3 of the Presidential Order no 1237 Regulations on the Procedure for Performing Military Service, adopted on 16 September 1999 and revised on 4 October 2022... After completing three months of compulsory military service, a person can sign a contract with the RAF and can be sent to combat areas. A person can also sign a contract after one month of his military service, if his previous education allows for it... When used during hostilities, conscripts who have signed contracts with the RAF are generally involved in tasks that require “less technical expertise,” such as positions in logistics, due to their limited period of training...

‘Several days before Russia announced the beginning of the “special military

¹¹⁵ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 17), December 2022

¹¹⁶ DIS, ‘[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)’, December 2022

¹¹⁷ Evening Standard, ‘[New Russian conscripts being sent to frontline...](#)’, 5 November 2022

¹¹⁸ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Russia](#)’, (section Military and security), Last updated: 14 February 2023

operation” on 24 February 2022, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers reported on phone calls from parents of conscripted soldiers, stating that their sons had either been forced to sign contracts with the RAF or were deployed to military units on the Russia-Ukraine border, with the majority being sent to the military bases in Belgorod region... In March 2022, independent TV channel Current Time reported on instances in which conscripts in Belgorod region were pressured to sign contracts with the Russian Armed Forces and those who refused to go to Ukraine were threatened with the articles on desertion of the Criminal Code...

‘Early March, a member of the Federation Council, Lyudmila Narusova, spoke about 100 conscripts who were sent to Ukraine after being forced to sign a contract with the RAF; according to her, only four of them survived... On 8 March 2022, President Putin said that conscripts were not used in hostilities in Ukraine, noting also that there would be “no additional call-up of reservists...” The next day, MoD acknowledged that some conscripts had been deployed to combat zones in Ukraine, noting that “some of them, serving in supply units had been taken prisoner by the Ukrainian army...” The spokesperson of Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, said that Putin had ordered the Military Prosecutor’s Office to investigate the deployment of conscripts to Ukraine and to punish the officials responsible for it...

‘On 7 June 2022, a military prosecutor of the Western Military District said that 600 conscripts had been sent to Ukraine and that around 12 army officers were prosecuted in connection with their deployment; some of the officers were dismissed from service...

‘Since Russia’s invasion in Ukraine, Ukrainian media have reported about Russian conscripts captured or killed during the fighting... According to investigative group Agenstvo, conscripts might have constituted more than half of the crew of the Russian flagship Moskva, which sank in the Black Sea on 14 April... A sailor who served his military service... as a cook on the ship at the time of the incident... was confirmed dead in August...

‘On 11 November, a human rights lawyer told the EUAA that they were not aware of any recent involvement of conscripts in hostilities in Ukraine. The source noted that, although the law allows the use of conscripts, there have been many reassurances from the authorities that they would not be used. However, as further explained by the source, conscripts were “widely moved to the border regions”, such as Belgorod, Kursk, Bryansk, Rostov, Krasnodar, and Russia-occupied Crimea. According to this source, there were no reports of conscripts being deployed to the newly annexed territories in Ukraine...’¹¹⁹

14.2.4 A DIS report which provides an update on military service since July 2022, and citing a variety of sources, stated:

‘After the declaration of the partial mobilisation and the annexation of Ukrainian territories, there have not been reports of conscripts deployed to the frontlines in big numbers, albeit individual cases could be happening... Conscripts are sent to Russian border regions to Ukraine, such as Belgorod, Kursk, Bryansk, Rostov, Krasnodar and the annexed Ukrainian region of

¹¹⁹ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 37-38), December 2022

Crimea. There are no indications that they are sent to frontlines or the occupied territories, according to a human rights lawyer... Two sources noted that military enlistment offices pressure or persuade conscripts into signing military contracts before the end of the conscription. If conscripts sign contracts, they can legally participate in the war as contract soldiers. Claus Mathiesen [Associate professor in Russian, Royal Danish Defence College] further stated that pressure on the conscripts to sign a military contract undoubtedly has increased... According to Sergey Krivenko [head of the human rights group [Citizen. Army. Law](#)], contracts are in a few cases signed by another person on behalf of the conscript himself. This happens due to a lack of monitoring...¹²⁰

14.2.5 The Dutch MFA report 2023, citing various sources, noted

'The current legislation³¹⁷ prohibits the deployment of conscripts in combat operations abroad if they have undergone less than four months of training. However, during a state of siege or general mobilisation, the immediate deployment of new conscripts or mobilised reservists is possible under the provisions of the laws of armed conflict. President Putin has declared a state of high alert³¹⁸ to varying degrees throughout the Russian Federation. As a result, the minimum training period of four months for conscripts is not mandatory in some regions. The annexation of four Ukrainian oblasts provides another possible basis for deployment, as Russian law does not preclude the use of conscripts on Russian territory, regardless of how much training they have received.³¹⁹

'Initially, conscripts were indeed used in the war in Ukraine and an unknown number of them were killed in action. For example, conscripts died on the sunken ship Moskva, just as in the Russian border region of Belgorod.³²⁰ After an initial denial by the Kremlin, the Ministry of Defence confirmed in early March 2022 that conscripts had indeed been deployed to Ukrainian territory at the start of the invasion of Ukraine, but according to the Ministry this would no longer happen and the responsible officers would be prosecuted.³²¹ Russian media later reported that twelve officers were being held responsible for sending more than 600 conscripts to fight in Ukraine.³²² While incidental reports of conscripts who had fought or died in Ukraine continued to appear after March, conscripts were later deployed only in other regions or in the border regions of Russia, such as in Belgorod, Kursk, Bryansk, Rostov, Krasnodar and in Russian-occupied Crimea.³²³ In February 2023, Novaya Gazeta reported attacks by the Ukrainian army on targets in the Russian border region of Belgorod and deeper into Russia, where conscripts were also stationed.³²⁴¹²¹

14.2.6 See also the country policy information note on [Ukraine Security situation](#)

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14.3 Pay

14.3.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources stated: 'In 2022, conscripts receive a monthly allowance ranging from 2,086 to 4,300 roubles

¹²⁰ DIS, '[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)', December 2022

¹²¹ Dutch MFA, '[Country of origin information report – Russian...](#)' (pages 46 to 47), 31 March 2023

[around 22 to 45 GBP¹²²], depending on duties and conditions of service...¹²³

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14.4 Conditions in service

14.4.1 The BBC in an article from March 2022 stated:

'... British intelligence says Russian troops in Ukraine are demoralised, short of equipment and refusing to carry out orders... Jeremy Fleming, the head of the UK's cyber-intelligence agency GCHQ, said the move added to indications Russia had "massively misjudged the situation" and had been forced to "significantly rethink". "We've seen Russian soldiers - short of weapons and morale - refusing to carry out orders, sabotaging their own equipment and even accidentally shooting down their own aircraft...'¹²⁴

14.4.2 In September 2022, Meduza, 'a Latvia-based liberal, independent website founded by the former editor of Lenta.ru'¹²⁵, reproduced a [Youtube video](#) of conditions in the military, explaining

'In the days since Vladimir Putin announced mobilization in Russia, myriad evidence of both illegal conscriptions and the sorry state of the Russian army has appeared online. Some new draftees have complained of being forced to buy their own sleeping bags and medications. Others have posted videos showing how soldiers are forced to sleep on benches or on the floor because their barracks have no beds. Still others have reported being issued rusty weapons and sent to the front with no training. An inside look at the true condition of Russia's military.'¹²⁶

14.4.3 Meduza reported on 6 October 2022 that 'Russians conscripted during mobilization are forced to buy their own military gear, since the army does not supply even the basics they will need when sent to the front. The Russian government website "We Explain," set up to answer questions about current laws and regulations, has posted an article, which says that conscripts should not expect reimbursement for their expenses.'¹²⁷

14.4.4 In October 2022 the Guardian ran an article where conscripts on the frontline had complained that they were having to buy their own equipment such as body armour and clothing¹²⁸.

14.4.5 The Guardian in an article from November 2022 reported on ill-prepared and untrained conscripts in Ukraine. Following one attack on Russian forces in October 2022 a survivor estimated that 130 out of 570 conscripts survived the attack. The Guardian commented:

'The incident points to Russia's willingness to throw hundreds of ill-prepared conscripts on to the frontline in Ukraine's east, where some of the heaviest fighting has been taking place, in an effort to stem Kyiv's advances. There is

¹²²Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

¹²³ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 17), December 2022

¹²⁴ BBC News, '[Ukraine war: Putin being misled by fearful advisers, US says](#)', 31 March 2022

¹²⁵ BBC-M, '[Media guide – Russia](#)', 15 February 2023 (subscription only)

¹²⁶ Meduza, '[What the Russian army really looks like](#)', 27 September 2022

¹²⁷ Meduza, '[Russian conscripts buy their own gear and essential medications...](#)' 6 October 2022

¹²⁸ The Guardian, '[The army has nothing': new Russian conscripts bemoan lack...](#)', 20 October 2022

growing anger in Russia as more coffins return from Ukraine, bringing home the remains of conscripts.

‘Some of the details surrounding last week’s shelling could not be independently verified. But the Guardian spoke to a second soldier, as well as two family members of surviving soldiers, who gave similar accounts.

“We were completely exposed, we had no idea what to do. Hundreds of us died,” said the second soldier, who asked to remain anonymous. “Two weeks of training doesn’t prepare you for this,” he said, referring to the limited military training conscripts received prior to being sent to Ukraine.

‘The Russian investigative outlet Verstka, which first reported on the incident on Saturday, cited the account of a third soldier, Nikolai Voronin, who similarly described coming under Ukrainian fire in the early hours of 2 November.

“There were lots of dead, they were lying everywhere... Their arms and legs were torn off,” Voronin told Verstka. “The shovels we used to dig our trenches were now being used to dig out the dead.”

‘The shelling has led to anguish in Voronezh, where a group of wives of the mobilised men recorded an angry video message on Saturday addressing the local governor.

“On the very first day, they put the draftees on the frontline. The command left the battlefield and fled,” Inna Voronina, the wife of a drafted soldier whose fate is unknown, said in the video.

‘The mother of another soldier can be heard saying: “They tell us over the phone that our sons are alive and healthy and even fulfilling their military duty. How the hell are they alive and healthy when they were all killed there?”’¹²⁹

- 14.4.6 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources stated: ‘The unpopularity of the military service is reportedly connected to [hazing \(dedovshchina\)](#), which has created “the complete domination of junior soldiers by their elders[“] and results ”in a widespread culture of robbery, torture, and sexual assault.”...’¹³⁰
- 14.4.7 An online article by CNN, updated in February 2023, described the fate of a convict who was sent from prison to fight for Russia in Ukraine: ‘In a last message to his wife, he said he feared officials from the Russian Ministry of Defense would soon take him from his hospital bed, where he recorded the audio message, and execute him. Days later, his body was returned to his wife in Moscow, in a closed coffin. Sevalnev’s callous fate joins a growing list of complaints of abuse from convicts whom CNN has spoken to.’¹³¹
- 14.4.8 An EUAA COI response from February 2023 and citing a number of sources, also described ‘hazing’ as consisting of:
- ‘... physical and psychological... violence by senior conscripts... and officers and extortion of money... – which was reported to have led to suicides,

¹²⁹ The Guardian, ‘[We were completely exposed’: Russian conscripts say...](#)’, 7 November 2022

¹³⁰ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 18), December 2022

¹³¹ CNN, ‘[Russian convicts say defense ministry is sending them from...](#)’, updated 15 February 2023

killings of fellow servicemen, and desertion... 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... 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.'¹³²

- 14.4.9 The Telegraph and LBC News have reported on footage that has emerged showing that mobilised soldiers are refusing orders and declining to go to war¹³³. LBC News reported on 9 March 2023 that a Kalingrad reservist said: "We are sent to certain death," one of the troops says in the [footage] clip.... the vicious fighting has left Russian soldiers fearful that they would not survive a deployment to the frontline, as Putin tries to throw in more and more men to their deaths in a bid to claim any territory he can. 'The soldiers discuss how they are furious at the death of their comrades and tell their officer they will "clash" in the cramped room if they are forced to go to the frontline, and would even walk or leave by a taxi if sent there.'¹³⁴
- 14.4.10 The USSD human rights report 2022 noted: "Reports of nonlethal physical abuse and hazing continued in the armed forces. Activists reported such hazing was often tied to extortion schemes.'¹³⁵

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Section updated: 6 July 2023

15. Mobilisation: reservists

15.1 Mass mobilisation system

- 15.1.1 Reuters explained in an article of 21 September 2022 that 'Russian law allows for mobilization in the event of foreign aggression or an attack on Russia — it is about preparing Russia's economy and Armed Forces for war. In particular, it means calling on Russia's military reserves.'¹³⁶
- 15.1.2 A Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a UK-based research institute specialising on military affairs, commentary of 28 September 2022 observed: 'During the Cold War, the Soviet Union acknowledged the importance of massed forces in a potential clash with NATO. It understood that without significant reserves of manpower and equipment, it would be unlikely to win in a prolonged conflict with the West. Because of this, the Soviet Union invested vast resources in a [mass mobilisation system](#).

¹³² EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)' (page 3-4), 17 February 2023

¹³³ The Telegraph, '["Why should I fight?", How Russian soldiers are mutinying in...](#)', 10 March 2023

¹³⁴ LBC News, '[Mutiny for Putin: Footage emerges of Russian troops refusing to...](#)', 9 March 2023

¹³⁵ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia](#)' (section 1), 20 March 2023

¹³⁶ Reuters, '[Explainer: What does Valdimir Putin's 'partial' mobilisation mean...](#)' 21 September 2022

‘However, many of the cadres responsible for maintaining the equipment and knowledge were [disbanded](#) after 2008, leading to a loss of equipment and capability. In their place, the Russian armed forces began experimenting with an operational reserve, which initially set out to maintain some form of mass reserve and a smaller operational reserve that could be used more regularly.’¹³⁷

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15.2 Procedures and regulations

15.2.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources stated:

‘The legal basis for mobilisation is laid down by two federal laws: on Mobilisation Preparations and Mobilisation and on Military Duty and Military Service... The draft process is carried out at regional and municipal levels via conscription commissions dealing with mobilisation. Prior to the conscription under the mobilisation, a commission must carry out a medical examination, based on which a draftee is assigned one of the categories, designated by first five letters of the Cyrillic alphabet: А – “fit for military service”; Б – “fit with minor restrictions”; В – “fit with limitations”; Г – “temporarily unfit for military service”; Д – “unfit for military service.” People recognised as “temporarily unfit” get a deferment from conscription for six months and people who were established to be “unfit” are not conscripted and removed from the reserve...’¹³⁸

15.2.2 The same EUAA report explained:

‘Similar to delivery of a draft notice for obligatory military service, draft notice under the mobilisation terms must be delivered in person and signed upon receipt... Leaving a draft notice in a mailbox or handing it to relatives is against the law, and a failure to follow a draft notice delivered in this way would bring “no legal consequences or liability.” A draft notice may be also served to a person at their work or study place... Failure to receive a draft notice is punishable in accordance with Article 21.5 of the Code of Administrative Offences with a fine of up to 3,000 roubles [circa 32 GBP¹³⁹]... According to a human rights lawyer, interviewed by EUAA in November 2022, there were “just a few such cases” as they must be initiated by military recruitment offices, and they have no resources for that...’

‘Article 21 of the Federal Law on Mobilisation Preparations and Mobilisation stipulates that the Russian nationals who are subject to mobilisation should report to assembly points (sborny punkt) as specified in mobilisation orders, draft notices, or orders by relevant authorities. It also prohibits the Russian nationals appearing on the draft register from leaving their place of residence without a special permission by relevant authorities... However, the law does not stipulate a punishment for leaving one’s place of residence...’

‘As explained by a human rights lawyer in November 2022, a draft notice requires a person to report themselves to a military recruitment office for a medical examination. Following the decision of the medical commission, the

¹³⁷ RUSI, [‘Understanding Russia’s Mobilisation’](#), 28 September 2022

¹³⁸ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 28), December 2022

¹³⁹ Xe, [‘Currency converter’](#), 23 March 2023

person is either sent back or receives instructions to come at a certain date to an assembly point, after which he is considered a military man. After this, a person can be punished in accordance with the current legislation on military service...'¹⁴⁰

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15.3 Partial mobilisation - September 2022

15.3.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'In February 2022, prior to the invasion, it was estimated that 190,000 Russian troops were stationed on the border with Ukraine... On 24 February 2022, Russia started a large-scale military invasion of Ukraine, targeting Kyiv as well as Kharkiv, Dnipro, Mariupol... and Odesa... President Vladimir Putin named the invasion a "special military operation"... aimed to protect the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" (DNR) and "Luhansk People's Republic" (LNR)... One day before the invasion, the Federation Council of the Russian Federation authorised the use of the Russian military outside Russia, as was requested by President Putin...'¹⁴¹

15.3.2 The EUAA Military service report continued:

'On 21 September 2022, President Putin signed an order on a "partial mobilisation in the Russian Federation". According to the presidential order, Russian nationals called for military service would have the status of contract servicemen... The mobilisation was named "partial" as it had to be applied to only those Russian nationals who had previously served in the Russian military forces and had acquired certain specialisations... such as riflemen, tank operators, artillery gunners, drivers, and driver-mechanics...

'According to [the Russian Ministry of Defence] MoD, the mobilisation aimed at calling to the service 300,000 reserve servicemen... which constituted 1.2 % of the number of the people listed in the reserve... According to the source, the first reservists who would be drafted were those with the most required military skills and combat experience. The source also noted that the need for medical support, in which women could be engaged, was minimal.'¹⁴²

15.3.3 The same EUAA report noted:

'The mobilisation order was met with criticism because of lack of transparency. Critics said that despite the mobilisation was named "partial", the non-classified articles of the order contained no definitions according to which the drafting of the reservists could be limited... The 7th paragraph of the decree, which is supposed to have the target number of people to be drafted under the mobilisation order, is classified... According to Novaya Gazeta, this paragraph would allow to draft up to one million reservists... while Meduza, referring to its sources in "one of the country's federal ministries," gave a number of 1.2 million... The Kremlin has denied these claims...'¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 30), December 2022

¹⁴¹ EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 12), December 2022

¹⁴² EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 26), December 2022

¹⁴³ EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 26-27), December 2022

15.3.4 However, Novaya Gazeta Europe, a media project launched by exiled journalists from the Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta¹⁴⁴, reported on 17 January 2023 that

‘The Russian president’s decree on “partial mobilisation” is still in effect, Artur Gayduk, member of the Pskov regional council, was [told](#) in a letter by the presidential administration in response to his appeal... no decree has been issued to legally end mobilisation. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov later said that no such document is required... Lawyer Pavel Chikov [notes](#) that unlike martial law which are regulated by law the completion of mobilisation is not set out legally. Ending mobilisation will strip the authorities of the opportunity to announce more mobilisation campaigns if needed without a new decree, the lawyer believes.’¹⁴⁵

15.3.5 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘On 28 October 2022, the Russian MoD announced the end of the “partial” mobilisation... reporting that 318,000 persons were drafted into RAF. ... However, the “partial” mobilisation decree has no end date and therefore, as noted by experts, allows for the additional draft... Ukrainian officials have made warnings about a second wave of mobilisation to start in winter 2022 on numerous occasions... The Russian authorities have repeatedly denied plans to launch a second mobilisation wave... stating that the mobilisation was completed on 31 October 2022... and that there was no need for a presidential decree to officially end it...’¹⁴⁶

15.3.6 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported in an article from March 2023:

‘Since the beginning of March, a growing number of military age men in 43 administrative regions across Russia have been receiving summonses to report to their local enlistment offices in what could be preparations for another round of military mobilization in the country, Russian human rights lawyers and advocacy groups say.

‘According to data compiled by various groups based on screenshots and photos of the summonses, the growing number has mostly been directed to reservists and university students that deferred military service because of their studies.

‘Many of those who received a summons have not reported to their local office, according [Go by the Forest](#), a Russian antiwar organization that aims to help Russians avoid being mobilized to fight in Ukraine, but [RFE/RL confirmed](#) that at least one reservist was immediately sent to a training camp after reporting to update his information at a military office in Russia’s Tyumen region in western Siberia.’¹⁴⁷

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15.4 Eligibility

15.4.1 The EUAA Military service report stated: ‘As explained by a rear admiral, who spoke with the independent news outlet Meduza as an official

¹⁴⁴ BBC, ‘[Media guide – Russia](#)’, updated 15 February 2023 (subscription only)

¹⁴⁵ Novaya Gazeta, ‘[Russia’s presidential administration: mobilisation decree...](#)’, 17 January 2023

¹⁴⁶ EUAA, ‘[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)’ (page 15), 17 February 2023

¹⁴⁷ RFE/RL, ‘[Don’t Go To The Enlistment Office’...](#)’, 25 March 2023

representative of the RAF, mobilisation was to “affect rank-and-file soldiers up to 35 years old, junior officers up to 50 years old, and senior officers up to 55 years old”.¹⁴⁸

- 15.4.2 A DIS report of December 2022 which provides an update on military service since July 2022, based a range of sources, stated with regard persons who are eligible for drafting during mobilisation:

‘Russian authorities stated that they would firstly call on persons who had served in the armed forces and those with military specialities and relevant experience...

‘According to Huseyn Aliyev [Lecturer and Research Fellow in Security Studies at Central & Eastern European Studies (CEES) at the University of Glasgow], medical doctors went to the frontlines to serve in their professional capacities rather than to participate in combat. This is because the Russian army experienced shortages of persons with experience in combat related injuries... However, a human rights lawyer stated that medical doctors have been sent to the frontlines as soldiers or drafted as shooters...

‘Call-ups take place in the first, second or third categories of the reserve in case of mobilisation... Depending on training backgrounds, the mobilised must undergo continuation training...’¹⁴⁹

- 15.4.3 Reuters and Novaya Gazeta reported in November 2022 that President Putin had signed a law allowing the mobilisation of those who have committed serious crimes or have outstanding convictions, including murder, robbery or drug trafficking. Exemptions include those convicted of sex crimes against minors, terrorism, treason or spying^{150 151}.

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15.5 Exemptions and deferrals

- 15.5.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘According to Article 18 of the Federal Law on Mobilisation Preparations and Mobilisation, a deferral from conscription under mobilisation conditions is granted to people who:

- ‘are found unfit for military service (the deferral is up to 6 months);
- ‘provide care for family members in need of constant assistance on health grounds;
- ‘were assigned as a permanent custodian or a guardian for their minor sibling;
- ‘have 4 or more dependent children under the age of 16 or are a single father of at least one child under the age of 16 (for women: have at least one child under the age of 16 or are over 22 weeks pregnant);
- ‘have a pregnant wife (over 22 weeks) and 3 dependent children under

¹⁴⁸ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 26), December 2022

¹⁴⁹ DIS, ‘[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)’ (page 13), December 2022

¹⁵⁰ Reuters, ‘[Putin signs law on mobilisation of people who have committed...](#)’, 4 November 2022

¹⁵¹ Novaya Gazeta, ‘[Putin signs law allowing to mobilise citizens ...grave crimes](#)’, 4 November 2022

the age of 16;

- 'have 4 or more siblings under the age of eight raised only by a mother;
- 'are members of the Federation Council or the State Duma....

'On 4 November 2022, the abovementioned law was amended to include deferral for people who joined volunteer military formations...

'According to Article 18, a deferral is also to be granted to "other citizens or certain categories of citizens" who would be given a right for a deferral by a presidential order...

'A decree signed by President Putin on 21 September granted exemption from the mobilisation draft to people employed by defence sector companies...

'On 24 September, deferrals were granted to full-time and part-time students "enrolled in educational programmes of a corresponding level for the first time,"... in the amended version of the order, a deferral was extended to such groups as post-graduate students and researchers...

'On 23 September, MoD announced that IT sector employees, bankers, and state media journalists would not be drafted under the mobilisation order. MoD stated that employers are to be asked to prepare a list of employees who meet the criteria and submit it to MoD offices....

'On 3 October, fathers of three and more children under the age of 16 were exempted from the draft....

'According to military officials, other groups which were exempted from conscription under the mobilisation were retired veterans removed from the draft register as well as Russian nationals who lived abroad and were removed from the draft register in Russia...' ¹⁵²

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15.6 Alternative civilian service

15.6.1 The Russian Free Press website, an online news portal, reported in September 2022 that alternative civil service is not an option for citizens in the case of mobilisation¹⁵³. The EUAA report stated with regard mobilisation: 'According to the experts interviewed by EUAA in November 2022, alternative civil service was not granted to people who had received a draft notice under the mobilisation order. ...' ¹⁵⁴

15.6.2 Similarly, Forum 18 (Norway), a human rights news group stated in an article from December 2022:

'No legal or practical provision exists for alternative civilian service (ACS) during mobilisation, despite the Constitution guaranteeing this right for every citizen. This has led to military recruitment offices refusing applications for ACS and sending conscientious objectors to military units. Moreover, a November legal amendment allows those already undertaking ACS after being called up for regular military service to be transferred to a non-combat

¹⁵² EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 28-29), December 2022

¹⁵³ Russian Free Press, ['The Russian authorities said that alternative service...'](#), 25 September 2022

¹⁵⁴ EUAA, ['The Russian Federation – Military service'](#) (page 30), December 2022

role within the Armed Forces. The amendment effectively "abolishes ACS as a peaceful alternative to military service" during mobilisation, says lawyer Valeriya Vetoshkina.

'For reservists whose religious (or other) beliefs prevent them bearing weapons or otherwise serving in the armed forces, the Russian government has made no legal or practical provision for alternative civilian service (ACS) during mobilisation, despite the country's Constitution guaranteeing the right to this for every citizen.'¹⁵⁵

15.6.3 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources stated:

'The official position of the authorities was that alternative civil service is not to be provided during the mobilisation period... In February 2023, the State Duma was to examine a proposal to substitute military service under mobilisation conditions with alternative civil service... 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...' ¹⁵⁶

15.6.4 Amnesty International noted in its annual report covering events in 2022 (AI report 2022) that:

'Despite constitutional guarantees regarding alternative service, requests to perform such service by individuals drafted for deployment in Ukraine were routinely refused by military commissariats and courts. The authorities claimed that in the absence of specific legislative provisions for alternative service at times of "partial mobilization", these guarantees did not apply. Legislation introduced in November stipulated that those deployed on alternative civilian service during mobilization could be sent to serve as civilian personnel in the armed forces.'¹⁵⁷

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15.7 Implementation and irregularities of call-up process

15.7.1 The Institute for the Study of War, in a Russian offensive campaign assessment from September 2022, citing other sources, observed:

'The Kremlin's heavy-handed approach to partial mobilization may successfully meet the Kremlin's internal quota of mobilized personnel, but is unlikely to generate effective soldiers and is prompting significant domestic backlash for little gain.

'The Kremlin is openly not adhering to its promised conditions for partial mobilization.

'Kremlin quotas will likely force local officials to mobilize men regardless of their military status and will likely incentivize the mobilization of ethnically

¹⁵⁵ Forum 18 (Norway), '[No legal provision for alternative civilian service during...](#)', 19 December 2022

¹⁵⁶ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)' (page 18), 17 February 2023

¹⁵⁷ Amnesty International. '[Russia 2022](#)', 28 March 2023

non-Russian and immigrant communities at a disproportionate rate.¹⁵⁸

15.7.2 A Guardian article from 22 September 2022 reported on mobilisation, including efforts in Buryatia in Eastern Siberia, noted:

“It’s not a partial mobilisation, it’s a 100% mobilisation,” said Alexandra Garmazhapova, president of the Free Buryatia Foundation, an activist group that has reported on the draft in the region. In the past day, she said, she and her colleagues had received and identified more than 3,000 reports of povestka, or draft papers, being delivered in Buryatia within just 24 hours of [Vladimir Putin](#) announcing the draft.

‘Despite assurances that [Russia](#) would be seeking men who had recently served in the army and had combat experience, activists pointed to a number of cases of men in their 50s receiving draft notices.

‘One woman said a 52-year-old relative had been delivered a povestka shortly before the president announced the draft the previous day.

‘Yanina Nimayeva, a journalist from Ulan-Ude in Buryatia, complained that her 38-year-old husband had received a draft notice despite never having served in the army.’¹⁵⁹

15.7.3 The Guardian also stated:

‘In Neryungri, the second largest town in Sakha, also known as Yakutia, video footage appeared to show dozens of men being gathered at the Gornyak football stadium and loaded on to buses bound for recruitment centres, as family members bid tearful farewells. Many of the men appeared to be in their 30s and 40s...

‘The breadth of the mobilisation across Russia is staggering. One video showed more than 100 potential draftees lined up behind an An-12 plane at an airport in Khurba in the far-eastern Khabarovsk region.’¹⁶⁰

15.7.4 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘Local authorities started issuing draft notices immediately after the announcement of the mobilisation... The day after the mobilisation was announced, media reported that draft notices were delivered to eligible men in the middle of the night... after which they were given an hour to pack their things and appear at enlistment centres... Media sources reported that draft notices had been distributed at factories... In Nizhny Novgorod, 37 workers were reportedly “mobilised” while at work and sent to a military unit for training... In mid-October, it was reported that draft notices requiring men to report to a military recruitment office were handed out at passport offices in St. Petersburg and Leningrad region...

‘During the first week since the announcement of the mobilisation order, thousands of men across the country were reportedly drafted into the RAF... [On 23 September 2022], the Caucasian Knot reported that first groups had been deployed from Makhachkala and Kaspiysk (Dagestan) as well as from

¹⁵⁸ ISW, ‘[Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment](#)’, 22 September 2022

¹⁵⁹ The Guardian, ‘[It’s a 100% mobilisation: day one of Russia’s drive to build...](#)’, 22 September 2022

¹⁶⁰ The Guardian, ‘[It’s a 100% mobilisation: day one of Russia’s drive to build...](#)’, 22 September 2022

Krasnodar... In Buryatia, “buses with mobilised men” from all over the region were reportedly arriving at the recruitment centre in the regional capital Ulan-Ude...

‘In Moscow and St. Petersburg, police and enlistment officers reportedly organised conscription raids at entrances to metro stations... In Moscow, a reporter at Sota.Vision news outlet said that draft notices to report at military recruitment offices were given to people taking part in anti-mobilisation protests on 21 September... In a city in the Moscow region, law enforcement officers reportedly blocked a restaurant exit to distribute draft notices to men... In Moscow, conscription raids were also reportedly organised in hostels... with people “with DNR passports” given draft notices next to Russian nationals... More than 200 men were reportedly taken to an enlistment center during a night raid on dormitories of a construction company and “dozens” were reportedly rounded up in a raid on a Moscow shelter for homeless...’¹⁶¹

15.7.5 With regard to irregularities in the implementation of the mobilisation order, citing numerous sources, the same EUAA report stated:

‘Sources reported on numerous irregularities in the implementation of the mobilisation order... including drafting people above the age stipulated for mobilisation according to particular military ranks... people who have passed the draft age... people physically unfit for military service... and who had been previously exempted from military service for health reasons... people who had not performed military service before... people who were enrolled as full-time students... fathers of three... or four or more children...

‘As noted by a human rights lawyer in an interview with EUAA on 11 November 2022, MoD issued no specific regulations on the “partial” mobilisation, and no normative acts were published prior to the announcement of the mobilisation order. Conditions of exemptions and deferrals were changed several times, which created a situation, in which military recruitment offices across the country were applying different reasoning for the conscription under the mobilisation order... According to Alexander Pomazuev, interviewed by EUAA on 9 November 2022, the mobilisation was “total”: even if the authorities tried to limit it by applying some categories, this was not possible to implement in practice due to the fact that the legislation and procedures are designed “for a total mobilisation”...

‘Alexander Pomazuev also stated that in practice officials in military recruitment offices ignored the lists of employees that were granted deferrals as the legislation on mobilisation did not provide for an exemption for these groups. Moreover, according to the source, military officials had no technical means to distinguish people non-eligible for mobilisation due to deferrals. He also noted that such exemptions were applied only to chief specialists...

‘Contrary to the requirements stipulated by the law on mobilisation, newly drafted persons reportedly received no medical examination at a military recruitment office to determine whether they were medically fit for military service... As explained by Alexander Pomazuev, the legislation requires that

¹⁶¹ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 26-27), December 2022

all Russian men in the age group of 18 – 50 years keep informing military recruitment offices about their health status; however, no one does this in practice. Therefore, the records in the mobilisation system indicate an outdated information on people's health condition, and everyone can get a draft notice. The source also noted that military recruitment offices have no human resources to check the medical conditions of draftees...' ¹⁶²

15.7.6 The DIS military service report continued with regard to persons who were actually mobilised:

'Three sources opined that any male could receive military summons for mobilisation... Sources reported that persons without combat experience... received military summons, as well as elderly persons and fathers of many children. In the Siberian city of Ulan-Ude, students were grabbed from their classes... In spite of the announcement of no drafting of persons working in the IT industry, such persons have been called up... Reports mention that people with disabilities and various stages of cancer received call-ups and were forced to show up at military enlistment offices... In Irkutsk in Siberia, men formerly exempted from the military due to health reasons received summons... Relatives of deceased individuals received call-up papers on their behalf...

'In the end of September 2022, President Putin and military officials declared that persons had been mobilised by mistake and sent back home... Huseyn Aliyev opined that persons who could prove they have been mobilised by mistake with documentation or evidence, possibly could be released... However, according to Gregory Shvedov, some of the men drafted by mistake, were probably sent to fight in Ukraine...' ¹⁶³

15.7.7 The same DIS report stated:

'When the Russian president announced the partial mobilisation in September, Kadyrov relatively quickly stated that Chechnya already had fulfilled its quotas, probably because he did not want to be pressured by the federal government...

'However, despite this statement, the Chechen authorities continued to mobilise individuals to the war. The authorities primarily targeted people who showed discontent either with the local government itself or with the war in Ukraine, or people that the authorities somehow disliked...

'According to Huseyn Aliyev, there are cases of men targeted by the Chechen authorities, taken directly from homes and brought to detention facilities, where they were beaten and tortured. Afterwards, they are sent directly to the front in Ukraine...

'The day of announcing the mobilisation, a group of women announced they would protest against sending their husbands and sons to war. The reaction from the authorities was very strong and minutes after the women assembled, the police detained all of them. Furthermore, the security forces apprehended their male relatives and sent them to Ukraine. The fate of the women themselves was unknown at the time of writing of this report...

¹⁶² EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 32-33), December 2022

¹⁶³ DIS, '[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)' (page 16), December 2022

‘On 1 November 2022, according to Caucasian Knot, Kadyrov threatened to continue the mobilisation effort in Chechnya, even though President Putin and the Minister of Defence Shoigu had declared the end of the mobilisation. Kadyrov stated that Chechens should hurry to sign up if they wanted to fight along with fellow Chechens, because otherwise they would end up in units with Russians.’¹⁶⁴

15.7.8 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘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... 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... On 11 January 2023, Ramzan Kadyrov claimed that 21,000 Chechens had been sent to fight in Ukraine... According to Caucasian Knot and its editor-in-chief Gregory Shvedov, who was interviewed by DIS [Danish Immigration Service] 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...’¹⁶⁵

15.7.9 The EUAA COI query of February 2023 stated:

‘Sources reported on the lack of medical examinations for people drafted under the mobilisation order... and on instances when people with chronic illnesses were found fit for military service... 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 an exemption from military service, military recruitment officers were reportedly ignoring respective medical history/documents... 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...’¹⁶⁶

15.7.10 Further, the same EUAA COI query noted: ‘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...’¹⁶⁷

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15.8 Ethnic minorities

15.8.1 The Guardian reported on 22 September 2022: ‘Many [mobilised men] are in

¹⁶⁴ DIS, ‘[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)’ (page 33), December 2022

¹⁶⁵ EUAA, ‘[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)’ (page 20), 17 February 2023

¹⁶⁶ EUAA, ‘[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)’ (page 18), 17 February 2023

¹⁶⁷ EUAA, ‘[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)’ (page 18), 17 February 2023

Russia's ethnic minority republics, reinforcing a sense that the country has been [disproportionately relying on ethnic minorities to provide its main fighting force in Ukraine](#). Those regions have also suffered a disproportionate number of deaths and casualties from the war.¹⁶⁸

15.8.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'In October 2022, the media reported that ethnic minority populations of Siberia and the North Caucasus... as well as Crimean Tatars... were disproportionately affected during the mobilisation. On 5 October, citing the research by [Vazhnye Istorii and CIT](#), Meduza reported that the percentage of people drafted under the mobilisation order reached 5.5 % in the Krasnoyarsk region, 4 % in Sevastopol, 3.7 % in Buryatia, 2.6 % in Dagestan, and 2.2 % in Kalmykia.

'It was also noted that poorer regions had mobilised a larger share of the reserve. Thus, 23 out of 26 regions that have drafted more than 1% of their reservists had lower per capita average income than the national average... Poorer regions have a higher number of people with military experience since the contract with the RAF is one of the few employment opportunities in these areas. According to researcher Sam Cranny-Evans as well as Meduza, this could explain why the higher number of reservists conscripted under the mobilisation order was in poorer regions... The same ethnic groups reportedly had disproportionate numbers of war casualties...

'Activists in Buryatia reported on intense recruitment following the announcement of the mobilisation order. According to the head of the Free Buryatia Foundation, Alexandra Garmazhapova, more than 3,000 draft notices were delivered in the republic within the first day of the mobilisation... Dorjo Dugarov, one of the leaders of the Buryat National Democratic Movement, told TV Rain (Dozhd TV) "that up to five thousand people were mobilised overnight."... The mobilisation efforts were reportedly organised "more like a raid," with draft notices being delivered late at night "and handed out indiscriminately to everyone."... In one of the villages, 450 people were reportedly mobilised within the first 24 hours... According to Victoria Maladaeva, vice president of the foundation Svobodnaya Buryatia (Free Buryatia), 20-30 men were drafted from every village. The local authorities admitted that draft notices had been issued to 70 fathers of large families: all of them were reportedly returned home following clarifications, even though some of them had already been assigned to respective military units. In one of the reported cases, a draft notice was issued for a man who died two years ago...' ¹⁶⁹

15.8.3 Freedom House (FH report 2023) Freedom in the World report 2023 covering events and key developments in 2022: 'Immigrants and ethnic minorities—particularly those who appear to be from the Caucasus or Central Asia—face governmental and societal discrimination and harassment; local NGOs and officials reported that ethnic minorities were disproportionately targeted in the mobilization drive that began in September

¹⁶⁸ The Guardian, '[It's a 100% mobilisation': day one of Russia's...](#)', 22 September 2022

¹⁶⁹ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 30), December 2022

2022.’¹⁷⁰

- 15.8.4 Similarly, the USSD human rights report 2023 covering events in 2022 (USSD HR report 2023) stated: ‘There were reports Russian authorities disproportionately mobilized members of non-Russian ethnic groups to fight in Russia’s war against Ukraine.’¹⁷¹

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15.9 Deployment to Ukraine

- 15.9.1 The EUAA report 2022, citing several sources, with regard persons drafted during the partial mobilisation in September 2022 noted:

‘Persons drafted under the mobilisation order cannot decline their deployment to the frontlines, and the time of their military service is not limited by any end date...

‘Sources reported on deployments of the “new recruits” to the frontlines almost immediately after they were drafted, without being examined by a medical commission... or provided any substantial training... As noted by researcher Pavel Luzin, as of 14 October, around 16,000 newly mobilised men were taking part in hostilities in Ukraine after having received between 5 and 15 days of military training... It was also reported that the recruits were not provided equipment and supplies... and had to buy these themselves... Referring to the Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, ISW reported on 3 November that the newly drafted personnel were used in offensives near Bakhmut, Vuhledar, and Avdiivka in Donetsk region, next to mercenaries and former inmates...’¹⁷²p

- 15.9.2 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources stated:

‘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... Soldiers who are not sent to take part in hostilities fill vacancies in military units in Russia... In January 2023, media reported that groups of servicemen mobilised from Yaroslavl ... and Novosibirsk regions were promised to serve in the defense forces but were sent instead to the frontlines without receiving any training or equipment...’¹⁷³

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15.10 Pay for mobilised/contract soldiers

- 15.10.1 With regard mobilisation the EUAA Military service report stated: ‘Newly drafted persons [under the mobilisation order] were promised monthly salaries of 135,000 – 200,000 roubles [1,428 to 2,117 GBP¹⁷⁴], depending on their rank. On 28 September, the State Duma passed a bill that ‘freezes loan repayments, including mortgages and consumer loans’ for men conscripted under the mobilisation order and other military personnel

¹⁷⁰ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Russia](#)’ (section F4), March 2023

¹⁷¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia](#)’ (section 5), 20 March 2023

¹⁷² EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 39), December 2022

¹⁷³ EUAA, ‘[Major developments in the Russian Federations...](#)’ (page 18), 17 February 2023

¹⁷⁴ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 22 March 2023

participating in the war in Ukraine...'¹⁷⁵

15.10.2 Reuters reported in November 2023: 'Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday ordered a one-time payment of 195,000 roubles ... [2,064 GBP¹⁷⁶] for contract soldiers and those who have been mobilised to fight in Ukraine, the Kremlin said.'¹⁷⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in November 2022 reported how men mobilized in Ukraine from Russia's Chuvashia region have not been paid salaries¹⁷⁸

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section updated: 6 July 2023

16. Evasion and desertion for conscripts and reservists

16.1 Law

16.1.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: 'A failure to inform military officials about a change of one's place of residence as well as a failure to present oneself at a military recruitment office is an administrative offence under Article 21.5 of the Code of Administrative Offences and is punishable by a fine in the amount of 500 – 3,000 roubles [5 to 32 GBP¹⁷⁹]...'¹⁸⁰

16.1.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

'Article 328 part 1 of the Criminal Code stipulates that "evasion of conscription in the absence of lawful grounds for release from the military service" is punishable by either a fine up to 200,000 roubles [GBP2,133¹⁸¹], or in the amount of the wage or salary, or any other income of the convicted person for a period up to 18 months... or by compulsory labour for a period up to two years, ... by arrest for up to six months, or by up to 2 years in prison...

'The criminal responsibility under Article 328 applies only in cases when the person has been found a draft evader by a court. The charges can be initiated in cases if a person deliberately ignores draft notices and calling-up for military service... As explained by a Prosecutor's office of Chelyabinsk region, a failure to report to military recruitment office after having received a draft notice or a failure to report to a place of assembly for a departure to a military unit are understood as draft evasion. The source explained further that actions such as self-inflicted injury to avoid military service, a failure to present oneself for a medical examination, or a failure to receive draft notices sent by a military recruitment office as well as obtaining fake documents to get an exemption from military service are considered draft evasion...'¹⁸²

16.1.3 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated:

¹⁷⁵ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 39), December 2022

¹⁷⁶ Xe, '[Currency converter](#)', 22 March 2023

¹⁷⁷ Reuters, '[Putin orders one-time \\$3,200 payment for mobilised and contract...](#)', 3 November 2023

¹⁷⁸ RFE/RL, '[More Than 100 Russian Men Mobilized To War In Ukraine...](#)', 3 November 2022

¹⁷⁹Xe, '[Currency converter](#)', 22 March 2023

¹⁸⁰ EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 16), December 2022

¹⁸¹ Xe, '[Currency converter](#)', 23 March 2023

¹⁸² EUAA, '[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)' (page 16), December 2022

‘According to Article 328.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, evasion from alternative civil service is punishable by a fine in the amount of up to 80 thousand roubles [853 GBP¹⁸³], or in the amount of the wage or salary, or any other income of the convicted person for a period up to six months, or by compulsory labour for a term of 180 to 240 hours, or by arrest for three to six months...’¹⁸⁴

16.1.4 The EUAA Military service report 2022, citing a range of sources, stated “Crimes against the established order of military service” are outlined in Chapter 33 “Crimes against military service” of the Criminal Code of the Russia Federation... (Articles 331 – 352.1)...’¹⁸⁵

16.1.5 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources stated:

‘Article 338 “Desertion” was also amended [in September 2022] to specify that desertion by a single person or a group of persons committed during mobilisation or martial law period as well as during wartime or in conditions of an armed conflict or combat operations would be punishable by a prison term of 5 to 15 years. An exemption from criminal liability can be applied if the action of desertion was committed for the first time and was “a consequence [informal translation] of a combination of exceptional circumstances”...’

‘Article 337 “Unauthorised abandonment of a military unit or a place of military service” was amended. Under the new legislation, unauthorised abandonment of a military unit for a period between 2 and 10 days is punishable by up to 5 years in prison; abandonment for a period of 10 days to 1 month is punishable by up to 7 years in prison; abandonment for a period of more than 1 month is punishable by 5 to 10 years in prison... The law specifies that these punishments are applicable to conscripts or contract soldiers who are fulfilling their duties during the period of mobilisation or martial law as well as during wartime and in conditions of an armed conflict or combat operations... The amended Article further explains that the first-time offenders [informal translation] “may be exempted from criminal liability if such unauthorised absence from his unit or place of service, or failure to report for duty without valid reasons, were the consequence of a combination of exceptional circumstances...”’¹⁸⁶

16.1.6 A DIS report of December 2022 which provided an update on military service since July 2022, citing a variety of sources, stated:

- ‘Article 328 of the Russian Criminal Code criminalises evasion or refusal of participation in military service or alternative civil service.
- ‘Articles 337 and 338 of the Criminal Code state that a soldier, in some cases, can be exempted from criminal liability if it was the first time they committed desertion and if the desertion occurred under unusual circumstances’¹⁸⁷

16.1.7 The DIS report 2022 also noted changes to the criminal code in September

¹⁸³ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 23 March 2023

¹⁸⁴ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 21), December 2022

¹⁸⁵ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 55), December 2022

¹⁸⁶ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 55-56), December 2022

¹⁸⁷ DIS, [‘Russia: An update on military service since July 2022’](#) (page 24 and 29), December 2022

2022 regarding, amongst other things, resisting orders, refusing to take part in the mobilisation and deserting from the military:

'On 20 September 2022, the Russian State Duma... approved, in three fast readings, several amendments to the Russian Criminal Code, on criminal liability for offences in the Russian Armed Forces... Both the Federation Council... and the president approved the amendments later the same day... The amended articles to the Criminal Code are the following...

- 'Article 332, 2.1; 2.2 regarding failure to execute an order during martial law, in times of war or in conditions of an armed conflict as well as refusal to participate in military or combat actions will be punished with two to three years imprisonment. If the consequences are assessed as serious, the prison term can be from three to 10 years;
- 'Article 333, 3 regarding resisting or forcing a superior to violate the duties of military service during mobilisation, martial law, in time of war or in conditions of an armed conflict can be punished with imprisonment from five to 15 years;
- 'Article 334, 3 regarding violent acts against a superior during mobilisation, martial law, in time of war or in conditions of an armed conflict can be punished with imprisonment from five to 15 years;
- 'Article 337, 2.1; 3.1... regarding unauthorised abandonment of a unit or place of service committed by a service member performing military service under conscription or under contract, during mobilisation or martial law, in time of war or in conditions of armed conflict or hostilities. The punishment is up to five years imprisonment for absence up to 10 days; up to seven years imprisonment for absence up to a month and five to 10 years imprisonment for absence more than a month;
- 'Article 338, 3 regarding desertion during mobilisation, martial law, in time of war or conditions of an armed conflict. The punishment is now imprisonment from five to 15 years; Article 339, 3 regarding evasion of military service by faking illness or other means will be punished with deprivation of liberty for five to 10 years during mobilisation, martial law, in time of war or conditions of an armed conflict;
- 'Article 340, 4; 5 regarding violation of the rules of combat duty where the punishment during mobilisation, martial law, war or armed conflict have been raised to five to ten years imprisonment for serious violations that threaten the security of the state, and up to five years imprisonment for actions caused by negligence or dishonesty;
- 'Article 347 regarding destruction or damage to military property by negligence will be punished with imprisonment up to five years when committed during mobilisation, martial law, war or armed conflict;
- 'Article 348 regarding loss of military equipment will be punished with prison up to seven years when committed during mobilisation, martial law, war or armed conflict;
- 'Article 352 regarding voluntary surrender is a new article introduced.

'... It was the first time that mobilisation was introduced to the Criminal

Code...

‘According to Claus Mathiesen, an associate professor in Russian at the Royal Danish Defence College, the enhanced legislation was introduced to avoid people trying to evade the mobilisation, as the Russian military had not been successful in mobilising volunteers... Claus Mathiesen noted that since the beginning of September [2022], it was obvious that the Russian government had planned a mobilisation as the legislation also criminalises, among other things, attempts to escape mobilisation...

‘According to Sergey Krivenko, the head of the Russian NGO, “Citizen, Army, Law,” that specialises in the situation for Russian military personnel, the amendments changed the situation for military conscripts and contract soldiers to the worse. It is no longer possible for them to refuse to participate in combat operations, and the consequences now will be criminal prosecution and not, as previous, the termination of a contract... Furthermore, the president signed a separate law on 24 September 2022, allowing a simpler access to Russian citizenship for foreigners who enlist in the Russian military...’¹⁸⁸

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16.2 Frequency of evasion/desertion

16.2.1 An April 2022 EUAA COI query on the treatment of military deserters by state authorities since February 2022, citing various sources, stated: ‘There have been reports of desertion or refusal to follow orders by some members of Russian forces during the course of the invasion... reportedly increasingly in March 2022, according to Ukrainian military sources.’¹⁸⁹

16.2.2 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: ‘Uncertainty about the profiles of people who would be mobilised created a panic across the country... Novaya Gazeta reported that 261,000 Russian men left the country between 21 and 24 September 2022...’¹⁹⁰ However, Freedom House in its report covering events in 2022 stated: ‘Some Russian media outlets estimated that as many as 700,000 people, mostly military-aged men, left Russia in the following two weeks to avoid being drafted.’¹⁹¹

16.2.3 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: ‘Many Russian young men, especially from a wealthier social class... and residents of large cities, such as Moscow and St Petersburg, try to avoid conscription. Legitimate ways to do this is to use a deferral due to studies or medical exemptions [see [Exemptions and deferrals](#)]... other options include paying bribes and forging university attendance... ‘Although the law requires that a draft notice must be delivered in person and signed upon receipt, recruitment officials used to leave draft notices in mailboxes which also offered potential conscripts a legitimate way to avoid conscription...’¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ DIS, ‘[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)’ (page 9), December 2022

¹⁸⁹ EUAA, ‘[Treatment of military deserters by state authorities since...](#)’ (page 2), 5 April 2022

¹⁹⁰ EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 26-27), December 2022

¹⁹¹ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World](#)’ (Russia), March 2023

¹⁹² EUAA, ‘[The Russian Federation – Military service](#)’ (page 18), December 2022

- 16.2.4 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources, stated: ‘The launch of the spring [2022] conscription campaign sparked fears that new conscripts would be sent to Ukraine notwithstanding the statements by the authorities and many reached out to NGOs for legal support to avoid military service...’¹⁹³
- 16.2.5 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated: ‘Many young men use... health-related exemptions to avoid military service...’¹⁹⁴ The same COI query stated:
 ‘On 20 January 2023, Pavel Chikov [head of human rights organisation [Agora](#)] 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)... 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)... Two experts interviewed by DIS [Danish Immigration Service] in October and beginning of November 2022 noted that Russian authorities were hiding the cases of military desertion from the public...’¹⁹⁵
- 16.2.6 The same EUAA report explained: ‘Lawyers and NGOs reported being “overwhelmed by demands for support” on how to avoid the draft under the mobilisation order... Anti-mobilisation activists advised Russian men to avoid reporting to military recruitment offices to avoid being drafted immediately...’¹⁹⁶

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16.3 Restrictions of movement

- 16.3.1 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources stated:
 ‘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.”... 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)... 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...’¹⁹⁷
- 16.3.2 The FH report 2023 covering events and key developments in 2022 stated: ‘Employees of the military and security services were banned from foreign travel in 2014. Following the September 2022 mobilization, reservists in many regions were prohibited from leaving their home districts, and men who received mobilization summons were refused passports. Authorities launched raids to locate military-age men during the mobilization, including

¹⁹³ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 18), December 2022

¹⁹⁴ EUAA, [‘Major developments in the Russian Federations...’](#) (page 10), 17 February 2023

¹⁹⁵ EUAA, [‘Major developments in the Russian Federations...’](#) (page 21), 17 February 2023

¹⁹⁶ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 30), December 2022

¹⁹⁷ EUAA, [‘Major developments in the Russian Federations...’](#) (page 14), 17 February 2023

those who were ostensibly exempt....¹⁹⁸

- 16.3.3 The same FH report 2023 noted regarding Russians who had emigrated after the invasion of the Ukraine began: ‘Some who tried to flee during the mobilization drive were met by security personnel who delivered conscription notices at border points.’¹⁹⁹
- 16.3.4 HRW in their world report 2023 for Russia and covering events of 2022 stated: ‘In October, President Putin declared martial law in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine and in parallel introduced varying “alert levels” in bordering regions of Russia, authorizing local governors to impose differing limitations on rights, in particular freedom of movement.’²⁰⁰

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16.4 Arrests and prosecutions

- 16.4.1 Human Rights Watch (HRW) in an article on facial recognition and draft evaders dated October 2022 stated:

‘Moscow authorities are using the city’s video surveillance system with facial recognition technology to track down and detain draftees seeking to evade mobilization for Russia’s war on Ukraine.

[‘BBC Russian](#) and [some Telegram channels](#) reported that at least seven men have been detained over the past month by law enforcement officers after the city’s facial recognition system flagged them to the police as “draft dodgers.” Following their detention, the men were brought to a police station and then a military enlistment office. While some were released as they were not eligible for the draft, at least two were told to go to the front line...

‘In addition to the seven recent detentions, in October [2022], prominent digital rights group Roskomsvoboda documented the case of an activist, Yulia Zhivtsova, detained by the police in the metro after the facial recognition system mistakenly flagged her as a draftee. She was then released, though charged for “discrediting the Russian army” because of the “no to war” tattoo on her palm. Zhivtsova said the facial recognition system used the image police had taken after detaining her at an anti-war protest.

‘Roskomsvoboda documented the case of another protest participant, Andrey (not his real name), also flagged by the metro’s facial recognition system to the police who then tried to hand him the draft letter.’²⁰¹

- 16.4.2 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:
- ‘... In December 2022, military recruitment and police officers and police reportedly conducted large-scale arrests of men of conscription age... 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 service... – were reported in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Volgograd,

¹⁹⁸ Freedom House, [‘Freedom in the World 2023 – Russia’](#) (section G1), March 2023

¹⁹⁹ Freedom House, [‘Freedom in the World 2023 – Russia’](#) (section D4), March 2023

²⁰⁰ HRW, [‘World Report 2023 – Russian Federation’](#), 12 January 2023

²⁰¹ HRW, [‘Russia Uses Facial Recognition to Hunt Down Draft Evaders’](#), 26 October 2022

Vladivostok... and other cities... As noted by the head of the human rights group [Citizen. Army. Law](#) Sergei Krivenko, the raids to fulfil the autumn draft quota were of extensive character, and police officers used such means as tracking mobile phones and using subway surveillance cameras...

'According to the Russian legislation, people who were called for military service, including alternative civil service, are prohibited to leave the count[r]y until the end of their service...' ²⁰²

16.4.3 The same COI query continued:

'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 [most] in ten years. In the same period in 2021, 385 such cases were brought to courts... 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...' ²⁰³

16.4.4 The EUAA COI query also stated: 'According to media sources, servicemen of RAF [which could include conscripts] situated in Ukraine are subjected to detention and ill-treatment, in case they refuse to continue fighting or return to the frontlines...' On 17 December 2022, a Russian investigative media outlet [The Insider](#) reported on the execution of at least 10 mercenaries of Wagner Group [by the Wagner Group] who had refused to continue fighting in Ukraine...' ²⁰⁴

16.4.5 A DIS military service report, citing other sources, stated:

'According to two interviewed sources, the risk of a criminal or administrative case is one of the main threats the government uses to drive people to military enlistment offices... Huseyn Aliyev stated that a person leaving Russia without having received a call-up notice, is not subjected to criminal prosecution... According to estimates from the Russian media RBC, the number of criminal cases initiated after the start of the spring conscription in 2022 until 20 September 2022 reached 410. On 5 October 2022, the first verdict in a criminal case on draft evasion as part of the partial mobilisation was settled. The defendant was a 32-year old man, Maxim Moiseyev, who refused to sign his call-up papers and subsequently failed to appear at the military enlistment office. The case was initiated under Article 328 of the Criminal Code. However, the case was later dropped...' ²⁰⁵

²⁰² EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)' (page 2-3), 17 February 2023

²⁰³ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)' (page 2-3), 17 February 2023

²⁰⁴ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)' (page 23), 17 February 2023

²⁰⁵ DIS, '[Russia: An update on military service since July 2022](#)' (page 26), December 2022

16.4.6 An EUAA COI query on the treatment of military deserters during 2019-2021, citing numerous sources stated:

‘According to Huseyn Aliyev [Lecturer and Research Fellow in Security Studies at Central & Eastern European Studies (CEES) at the University of Glasgow], Articles 337 [unauthorised abandonment of a military unit] and 338 [desertion] of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation were “widely implemented” before the start of the war in Ukraine... Examples of cases found were the following:

- ‘In May 2019, local media reported that the Naro-Fominsk Garrison Military Court sentenced a former conscript, who had abandoned his military unit in July 2006, to 2.5 years in a penal colony...
- ‘In November 2021, the Novosibirsk Garrison Military Court punished a contract serviceman with a one-year restriction from the service and a withholding of 15 % of his salary under Article 337... of the Criminal Code, after he had abandoned the place of service without a valid reason...

‘According to the Washington Post, writing in March 2022, evasion of military service has been rife with corruption for years, with officials being reluctant to allow exemptions, and a network of corrupt officials allowing those who can pay thousands of dollars to avoid military service through bribes and fraud. The same source noted that draft evasion is especially common in larger cities like Moscow or St. Petersburg but is challenging for those with less means in less well-off areas...’²⁰⁶

16.4.7 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources stated:

- ‘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...
- ‘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...

‘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.

²⁰⁶ EUAA, [‘Treatment of military deserters by state authorities since...’](#) (page 10), 5 April 2022

- ‘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....
- ‘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....
- ‘On 29 December 2022, the 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....
- ‘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 Ukraine... and went into hiding until September....
- ‘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....
- ‘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....’²⁰⁷

16.4.8 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources stated:

‘Servicemen who refuse deployment to Ukraine are tried under the Article 332 of the Criminal Code “Failure to execute an order”, ... which, in its version amended on 24 September 2022, stipulates a punishment in the form of a prison term for up to 10 years...

- ‘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...
- ‘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...
- ‘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 Sevastopol. As reported by the media, convicts were cousins, who were serving in the Belgorod garrison of

²⁰⁷ EUAA, [‘Major developments in the Russian Federation...’](#) (page 21,22), 17 February 2023

Russia's Amur region. Both pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 3 years and 4 months and 3 years and 5 months respectively in a penal colony...'²⁰⁸

'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...'²⁰⁹

16.4.9 The New York Times (NYT) in an article dated 30 April 2023 reported

'Last year, 1,121 people were convicted of evading mandatory military conscription, according to statistics from Russia's Supreme Court, compared with an average of around 600 in other recent years. Before the war, a vast majority were fined, not imprisoned. Russia recently [passed a measure](#) making it much harder to avoid a draft summons.

'In addition, criminal cases have been initiated against more than 1,000 soldiers, mostly for abandoning their units, according to [a broad court survey](#) by Mediazona, an independent Russian news outlet. Anticipating the problem in September, when several hundred thousand civilians [were mobilized](#), Russia toughened the penalties for being AWOL.

'The maximum sentence was doubled to 10 years for what is euphemistically called "Leaving for Sochi." (SOCH is the Russian acronym for AWOL, but the expression is a play on the name of Sochi, a Black Sea getaway for the country's elite and site of the 2014 Winter Olympics.) Refusing an order to participate in combat carries a sentence of three to 10 years.

'... The Kremlin has shrouded in secrecy an increasing amount of information about the military, including new statistics about crimes involving military service, so the numbers are undoubtedly higher than what is available. But the number of AWOL cases accelerated after the general mobilization, according to Mediazona. Many criminal cases involve soldiers who refused orders to enter battle, leading to confrontations with their commanders, according to several lawyers who defend soldiers.'²¹⁰

16.4.10 The NYT article further reported:

'Some Russian courts still publicize military cases to create a chilling deterrent to potential deserters. In the spring, for example, a court announced that a sailor who had gone AWOL twice had been sentenced to nine years in a prison colony.

'The Krasnoyarsk Garrison Military Court released a photograph and a statement in December showing dozens of soldiers crowding a courtroom to watch an AWOL case. The sentence was pronounced before that audience "for preventive purposes," the statement said.

'In the Belgorod region near the Ukrainian border, two soldiers were detained on a parade ground in November and charged with refusing to obey a deployment order. They were called out of the ranks, handcuffed and thrown into a paddy wagon in front of their unit, all shown on a video posted

²⁰⁸ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)' (page 22,23), 17 February 2023

²⁰⁹ EUAA, '[Major developments in the Russian Federation...](#)' (page 22-23), 17 February 2023

²¹⁰ NYT, '[They Refused to Fight for Russia. The Law Did Not Treat Them Kindly](#)', 30 April 2023

on the Telegram messaging app. Earlier this month, both were sentenced to three years in prison, according to Russian news media reports.

'... Major Zhilin, 36, [a]... soldier who left for Kazakhstan... [but was deported back to Russia was] In March [2023]... was sentenced to six and a half years in a penal colony and stripped of his rank.'²¹¹

16.4.11 The ECBO annual report for 2022/23, citing the Russian anti-war NGO, [Movement of conscientious objectors](#) (MCO), observed

'The... courts have dealt with 708 cases initiated under criminal articles that were made more stringent following the start of mobilization, including unauthorized abandonment of military service, disobedience of orders, and desertion. Judgments have been issued in 360 of these cases. Unauthorized abandonment is the most frequent charge, accounting for 629 cases, with more than half of these soldiers being absent for over a month. Objectors and deserters are often subjected to show trials to intimidate other soldiers, with arrests taking place in front of their units, verdicts being announced within military units, and judges delivering "preventive talks."

'Yet, these cases are often concealed from the public. Verdicts are frequently not published, and sentencing details and statistics are withheld under the guise of military secrecy.'²¹²

16.4.12 The ECBO annual report for 2022/23, citing MCO, stated:

'... A significant number of service members, over a third of the known sentences under the AWOL article, receive suspended sentences, allowing them to be returned to the front lines. Meanwhile, those refusing to participate in the war without deserting their units are charged with disobeying orders. The number of such defendants is rising, with 25 cases currently pending in the courts. However, legal experts suggest that non-compliance with orders is a preferable option for conscientious objectors, as the penalties for not executing orders are generally less severe than those for other mobilization-related offenses.

'Despite the escalating number of cases against conscientious objectors, a high proportion of those convicted receive suspended sentences and are reassigned to the front lines. Soldiers who leave their units during wartime for reasons such as visiting loved ones or lack of understanding of the implications typically face less harsh punishments than those deserting to evade being deployed to the front lines. The courts' stance on this matter is still evolving, with no unified position established yet.

'The handling of conscientious objectors by the Russian military raises significant concerns regarding the military justice system and soldiers' rights. The use of show trials for objectors and deserters as an intimidation tactic, coupled with the frequent concealment of such cases from the public eye, highlight a dearth of transparency and accountability in the military justice system. The common practice of issuing suspended sentences and reassigning service members to the front lines also raises questions about the efficacy of these sentences in deterring such conduct. The increasing

²¹¹ NYT, ['They Refused to Fight for Russia. The Law Did Not Treat Them Kindly'](#), 30 April 2023

²¹² ECBO, ['Annual Report – Conscientious Objection to Military Service...'](#) (page 68), 12 May 2023

number of cases against conscientious objectors underscores the challenges faced by those endeavoring to exercise their human rights while serving in the military.²¹³

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16.5 Treatment of prisoners who refuse military recruitment

16.5.1 The EUAA Military service report, citing a range of sources stated:

‘Due to the difficult prison conditions in Russia, characterised by violence and a lack of perspective, there is a strong willingness among prisoners to join Wagner and other military actors, according to Olga Romanova from RBB... However, there are also reports suggesting that prisoners who decline the offer are sometimes exposed to pressure, reprisals such as solitary confinement and to forced deployment. Thus, a September 2022 joint NGO report states that inmates collaborating with the prison administration (so-called “activists”) “were pressuring” those who had not volunteered into signing a contract in penal colonies IK-6 and IK-7 in Leningrad region, following a visit by Wagner... An inmate from another penitentiary reported in a similar case that the prison administration itself had threatened non-volunteers with “shuddering and suffering”...

‘According to an article published by the independent Russian news portal Verstka on 5 August 2022, prisoners who did not take the deal were sent to solitary confinement in at least two facilities, namely penal colonies IK-7 (Republic of Karelia) and IK-19 (Komi Republic). After initially expressing their willingness to join the fight, they had eventually decided not to sign the contract... In another case of inmates changing their mind, which occurred in IK-2 in Yaroslavl region shortly before the volunteers were transferred from the colony, the two inmates concerned were beaten up by the prison staff... Finally, in terms of forced deployment, the independent news outlet SOTA reported on 17 September 2022 that Wagner had begun to recruit and relocate murderers and other violent offenders from penal colony IK-4 (Mari El Republic) against their will... Within the time constraints for drafting this report, no further accounts of actions taken against convicted inmates unwilling to join Wagner were found in the sources consulted...’²¹⁴

16.5.2 With regard MoD recruited prisoners the EUAA military service report stated: ‘According to a prisoner’s account published on Gulagu.net, inmates of “red” penal colony IK-11 in Nizhny Novgorod region were put under pressure by ministry staff to join the battalion under threat of forced recruitment and solitary confinement for the rest of their prison term... No information could be found among the sources consulted on whether the ministry has put these threats into practice.’²¹⁵

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17. Prisons and detention centres

²¹³ ECBO, [‘Annual Report – Conscientious Objection to Military Service...’](#) (page 67), 12 May 2023

²¹⁴ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 45-46), December 2022

²¹⁵ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 46), December 2022

17.1 Note on available information

17.1.1 The information below is about detention conditions generally, including for those persons considered to be political prisoners. There is limited information on detention conditions specific to persons who have evaded or deserted military service (see [Bibliography](#)).

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17.2 Penitentiary system

17.2.1 The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Russia prisoner's pack, which provides advice for UK nationals who may be arrested and detained in Russia, updated 30 January 2023 (FCDO advice 2023) stated:

'The penal system in Russia is run by the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. Russian Criminal Enforcement Code and Russian Ministry of Justice Order N295 of 16/12/16 "On internal regulations at penal institutions" set out the prison conditions and prisoners' rights and responsibilities.

'Prisoners serve their sentences in the following facilities:

- penal camps (исправительная колония), including penal settlements (колония-поселение), general camps (колония общего режима), high-security camps (колония строгого режима) and special camps (колония особого режима)
- prisons (тюрьма)
- correctional camps (воспитательная колония)
- medical penal facilities (лечебные исправительные учреждения)

'Depending on one's sentence and circumstances, 3 imprisonment regimes may apply in each type of a penal facility:

- standard
- flexible
- strict

'The judge's verdict provides the type of penal institution where a convicted person is to serve their sentence. The FSIN decides which penal facility a prisoner will be sent to.'²¹⁶

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17.3 Conditions, including abuse and ill-treatment

17.3.1 The Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (ICJPR) at Birkbeck, University of London, noted in its World Prison Brief entry for Russia, with data variably updated over 2022, that there are 872 (penal) establishments with an official capacity of 714,253, but which had 433,006 inmates - an occupancy level of 67%²¹⁷.

17.3.2 UN Human Rights Committee in its 'Concluding observations on the eighth

²¹⁶ UK FCDO, '[Arrested or detained in Russia](#)', updated 30 January 2023

²¹⁷ ICJPR, '[World Prison Brief](#)' (Russian Federation), no date

periodic report of the Russian Federation’ as part of the review of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights based on submissions by the UN, civil society stakeholders and the State party, dated 1 December 2022, observed with regard to torture including in detention facilities:

‘The Committee is deeply concerned about reports of torture and ill-treatment in the State party, and that the prevalence of torture and ill-treatment is exacerbated by a lack of effective investigation into torture complaints and into reprisals against complainants, the absence of reliable disaggregated statistics and the absence of the offence of torture as a separate crime in the legislation of the State party. The Committee is also concerned about reports that, although it is prohibited by law, detainees are used to maintain order in penitentiary facilities, and that their imposition of order reportedly includes acts of torture and ill-treatment of other detainees. The Committee is further concerned about reports of inadequate conditions in penitentiaries and other detention facilities in the State party and in territories where the State party exercises effective control, and about the lack of effective monitoring, which are conducive to the torture and ill-treatment reportedly perpetrated at these facilities...’²¹⁸

17.3.3 The UK FCDO advice 2023 noted: ‘The conditions in penitentiary institutions are impacted by the poor state of the infrastructure mostly built before 1970 and remain among the worst in Europe. Corruption in Russian prisons is widespread. Detention conditions can depend on your financial status and connections in the criminal world.’²¹⁹

17.3.4 The UK FCDO advice 2023 further observed:

‘In Russia, separate prison facilities are used for sentenced prisoners (camps and prisons) and those on remand (pre-trial detention centres).

‘In pre-trial detention centres, a cell normally accommodates one or several persons.

‘In penal camps prisoners are accommodated in barracks with the capacity of 20 beds or more and are expected to work until they reach retirement age. Prisoners serving their sentences in penal settlements are also accommodated in barracks but are allowed to move freely within the confines of the settlement during the day and may live with their families on the territory of the settlement.

‘There are 8 prisons in Russia where prisoners are confined to cells. These accommodate prisoners convicted for most severe crimes, those in breach of their ongoing sentence regime or sentenced for life and repeat offenders.

‘Overcrowding of prisons in Russia is gradually becoming less of a problem. Russia is among the low-density prison population countries in Europe with its [penitentiary institutions loaded to 66.6% of their capacity in 2021](#). Each prisoner is provided with a separate bed, a mattress, a pillow and a blanket. Bedding is usually changed on a weekly basis.

‘There are normally washbasins, electricity and running cold water in the

²¹⁸ UN HRC, [ICCPR concluding report](#) (paragraph 2022), 1 December 2022

²¹⁹ UK FCDO, [‘Arrested or detained in Russia’](#), updated 30 January 2023

cells and barracks. Cells and barracks may or may not have hot water, and most of them have natural light. Cells and barracks are normally heated from October until May.²²⁰

17.3.5 The UK FCDO advice 2023 noted:

‘Normally, you are entitled to 3 hot meals a day. The diet includes carbohydrates, fats and proteins. It is based on the calorific intake sufficient to sustain human health but tends to be bland and lacking fresh vegetables and fruits or dairy products. Those with severe health issues or disabilities, adolescents and pregnant women are entitled to an improved diet.

‘The prison diet does not cater to specific religious, or lifestyle needs. You can supplement your diet by buying food from a prison shop with the money from your private prison account. However, there is a limit to the amount of money you can spend each month, depending on the detention regime.

‘Your family or friends can also bring or send food, although there are multiple restrictions on what they can or cannot bring, and they vary depending on a specific facility. There is also a limit to the number and weight of parcels, which you are entitled to, and it depends on your detention regime... tap water is normally used for drinking, but the quality of water may vary depending on the geographic region.’²²¹

17.3.6 The UK FCDO advice 2023 continued

‘Barracks or cells normally have running cold water but may or may not have hot water. There is usually a schedule to take hot showers at a prison facility. You can take a shower at least twice a week, while your underwear and bedding should be changed weekly. The shower facilities are communal.

‘Conditions at shower stalls and toilets may vary depending on a specific facility and may be substandard at the older facilities.

‘Prison administration should provide basic toiletries, including soap, toothpaste and toothbrush, toilet paper, shaving razors for men and hygienic supplies for women. Basic toiletries are normally available at prison shops.’²²²

17.3.7 The UK FCDO advice 2023 also stated:

‘Work is compulsory for prisoners, and the type and place of work available is determined by the prison administration. Due consideration should be given to your psychical capacity, age and health conditions. Work can only be carried out on the prison premises.

‘You are paid for your work, with your pay transferred to your personal prison account. The size of pay may vary depending on a type and amount of work done. The cost of your sustenance is subtracted from your monthly pay. Regardless of the actual cost, a minimum of 25% pay should still be transferred to your account.

‘The working hours are defined in accordance with the Russian labour law and are normally 6 to 8 hours per day with a break for a hot meal, 5 or 6

²²⁰ UK FCDO, ‘[Arrested or detained in Russia](#)’, updated 30 January 2023

²²¹ UK FCDO, ‘[Arrested or detained in Russia](#)’, updated 30 January 2023

²²² UK FCDO, ‘[Arrested or detained in Russia](#)’, updated 30 January 2023

days a week. The exact working schedule is set by the prison administration. Working prisoners are entitled to an annual leave from work of 12 working days.

‘Prisoners usually work at the manufacturing facilities located at the prison premises. These usually include manufacturing of clothes or spare parts for machinery, wood processing or working at a prison kitchen.

‘Prison administration may request you to work for free on repairing and renovating prison premises.

‘Russian prisons normally offer vocational training courses with a qualification. Prison administrations can also support you to enrol in postal studies, where possible. You must speak Russian to get enrolled in either. Enrolling in postal studies with a foreign institution or in a foreign language is normally not allowed.’²²³

17.3.8 The UK FCDO advice 2023 also noted:

‘In camps, you are permitted to go outdoors within the premises and move around during the day: to and from work - in a group accompanied by camp guards, or unaccompanied during your free time. You are not allowed to leave your barracks at night.

‘Movement around premises is restricted for prisoners in special camps and prisons and those serving in other types of camps under strict regimes or subjected to disciplinary actions. The prisoners under strict imprisonment conditions are allowed an hour long walk at a specially designated outdoor area. Depending on their type and regime as well as their infrastructure, prisons may have sport facilities available to prisoners and organize regular group exercises for inmates.’²²⁴

17.3.9 The USSD human rights report covering events in 2022 stated:

‘Conditions in prisons and detention centers varied but were often harsh and life threatening. Overcrowding, abuse by guards and inmates, limited access to health care, food shortages, and inadequate sanitation were common in prisons, penal colonies, and other detention facilities.

‘... Prison overcrowding remained a serious problem. Overcrowding, ventilation, heating, sanitation, and nutritional standards varied among facilities but generally were poor. Opportunities for movement and exercise in pretrial detention were minimal. Potable water was sometimes rationed, and food quality was poor; many inmates relied on food provided by family or NGOs. Access to quality medical care remained a problem, with NGOs reporting approximately 50 percent of prisoners with HIV did not receive adequate treatment. While the law mandates the separation of women and men, juveniles and adults, and pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners in separate quarters, anecdotal evidence indicated not all prison facilities followed these rules. In 2020, Amnesty International reported that prisons’ overcrowding, poor ventilation, and inadequate health care and sanitation led to a high risk of COVID-19 infection among prisoners and detainees. According to a 2021 Council of Europe report, the mortality rate of the

²²³ UK FCDO, ‘[Arrested or detained in Russia](#)’, updated 30 January 2023

²²⁴ UK FCDO, ‘[Arrested or detained in Russia](#)’, updated 30 January 2023

country's prison population in 2019 increased by more than 12 percent, compared with the previous year.

'Physical and sexual abuse by prison guards was systemic. For example, in August, former inmates spoke to the BBC about systemic abuse, including rape and torture, in the country's prisons. Former inmate Aleksey Makarov alleged he was tortured and repeatedly raped while held in the Saratov prison hospital in 2018. This followed the 2021 leaked footage of numerous abuses at the Saratov prison hospital and other facilities throughout the country. Human Rights Watch recorded numerous instances of abuse and torture of anti-war activists throughout the year. For example, activist Artyom Kamardin was beaten and tortured into an "apology" for reciting poetry to protest Russia's war in Ukraine. Prisoner-on-prisoner violence was also a problem. For example, in January, one prisoner died from having his throat slit, presumably by another prisoner, in Angarsk penal colony No. 2. There were reports prison authorities recruited inmates to abuse other inmates...

'There were reports that political prisoners were placed in particularly harsh conditions and subjected to punitive treatment within the prison system, such as solitary confinement or punitive stays in psychiatric units. Former political prisoners described having to carry out meaningless tasks multiple times a day and being sent to the "punishment brigade" for minor infractions, conditions that one prisoner described as psychologically harrowing. During the year media coverage of multiple allegations of torture at several penal colonies and testimony from victims and their family members prompted investigations by the Federal Penitentiary System. Valery Balan, the deputy director of the Federal Penitentiary System, was dismissed from his post on May 12 in connection with reports of widespread torture in penal colonies, according to media.'²²⁵

17.3.10 The AI report 2022 noted: 'Torture and other ill-treatment in places of detention remained endemic and prosecutions of perpetrators were rare. Provision of medical care to detainees remained inadequate. Prohibition of contact with the outside world and the arbitrary placing of prisoners in punishment cells were widely used to exert pressure on prisoners, especially dissidents.'²²⁶

17.3.11 The USSD in a country report on human rights practices in Ukraine: Russia-Occupied areas, stated:

'Prison and detention center conditions in Crimea, and in Donetsk, Kherson, Lugansk, and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts reportedly remained harsh and life threatening due to overcrowding, poor conditions, lack of heating and medical care, poor food quality, and insufficient potable water.

'Abusive Physical Conditions: According to the Media Initiative for Human Rights, there was an extensive network of unofficial detention centers in the Russia-occupied areas located in basements, sewage wells, garages, and industrial enterprises. According to Human Rights Watch, women detainees were denied medical care, including sexual and reproductive health care.

'According to a June report by the UN secretary-general on the situation in

²²⁵ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia](#)' (section 1c), 20 March 2023

²²⁶ Amnesty International. '[Russia 2022](#)', 28 March 2023

Crimea, “Detainees face cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and intimidation from prison staff or law enforcement officers.” According to the report, detainees complained of systematic beatings and humiliating strip searches by prison guards.

‘According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, detainees held in the Simferopol, Crimea, pretrial detention center diagnosed with HIV as well as with tuberculosis and other communicable diseases were kept together in a single cell. There were reports detainees were denied medical treatment, even for serious health conditions.

‘Prison authorities reportedly retaliated against detainees who refused Russian Federation citizenship by placing them in smaller cells or in solitary confinement.’²²⁷

17.3.12 Freedom House noted in its report covering events in 2022 that ‘Prisons are overcrowded and unsanitary; inmates lack health-care access and are subject to abuse by guards. Prisoners have also been solicited and coerced to fight in Ukraine. In November, Putin signed amended legislation allowing for the conscription of recently released prisoners.’²²⁸

17.3.13 Freedom House’s Nations in Transit report covering in 2022 and early 2023, authored by Margarita Zavadskaya, a senior research fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, citing various sources, noted:

‘Prison conditions in Russia fall short of international standards for treating the incarcerated with dignity and respecting their rights. Prison authorities regularly resort to cruel methods and outright torture, while cutting off opportunities to communicate with the outside world. The case of U.S. basketball player Brittney Griner, who was sentenced to nine years in prison for drug smuggling, put a spotlight on the grim conditions and lack of transparency in the prosecution process.’²²⁹

17.3.14 There was no specific information in the sources consulted of the space allocated to prisoners in general or specific institutions (see [Bibliography](#)).

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17.4 Treatment of soldiers deserting from posts

17.4.1 The EUAA military service report noted that:

‘In April 2022, DW reported on instances of alleged “unlawful detention, torture, and inhumane treatment” in Russian controlled areas of Ukraine of contract soldiers who had refused to fight and expressed their wish to leave Ukraine. These cases were reported on the territory of LNR, including in the towns of Popasna, Alchevsk, Stakhanov, and Krasny Luch, as well as ‘near the frontline in Svitlodar.’... On 12 March, the Ukrainian Defence Intelligence claimed that a captured Russian soldier “spoke about the use of ‘execution squads” to eliminate deserters in the midst of rising unrest in the Russian military...

‘In July 2022, Ukrainian media outlet Obozrevatel reported that Russian

²²⁷ USSD, ‘[Human rights practices in Ukraine: Russia-Occupied areas](#)’ (section 1c), 20 March 2023

²²⁸ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023](#)’ (Russia), March 2023

²²⁹ FH, ‘[Nations in Transit 2023](#)’ (Russia), May 2023

soldiers opened fire at around 30 members of their military unit attempting desertion... On 4 November, UK Ministry of Defence noted via its official Twitter account that — based on UK Defence Intelligence — “Russian forces have probably started deploying ‘barrier troops’ or ‘blocking units’ to Ukraine”. According to the source “[t]hese units threaten to shoot their own retreating soldiers in order to compel offensives and have been used in previous conflicts by Russian forces.” ...²³⁰

17.4.2 In a November 2022 report by the Insider, a Russia-focused, independent media outlet, it was stated that:

‘The Russian military keeps taking mobilized soldiers who refuse to fight to special camps. One of the camps is located in the village of Zavitne Bazhannya in the Donetsk region, and it has not been previously reported. The Insider learned about it from several wives and mothers of objectors. According to them, 21 men are now sitting there in the basement, periodically they are forced to dig dugouts and threatened to be sent to the front lines or shot. Contract servicemen guard them, and no one knows where the command is...’²³¹

17.4.3 A March 2023 article in the Guardian stated that:

‘Members of a recently formed Russian assault unit say their commanders deployed troops to stop them from retreating and threatened them with death after they suffered “huge” losses in eastern [Ukraine](#)... “We sat under open mortar fire and artillery for 14 days,” Alexander Gorin, a Russian soldier, is heard saying in the appeal, [which first appeared on Friday](#) on Russian Telegram channels. “We took huge losses. Thirty-four people were injured and 22 died, including our commander.”... Gorin said his men made the decision to head back to the Russian army headquarters but were denied evacuation by their superiors: “They placed barrier troops behind us and weren’t letting us leave our position ... They are threatening to destroy us one by one and as a unit. They want to execute us as witnesses of a completely negligent criminal leadership.”

‘Barrier troops or anti-retreat forces are military units positioned behind frontline forces to maintain discipline and prevent soldiers from fleeing.’²³²

17.4.4 The ECBO annual report for 2022/23, citing material from the Russian anti-war NGO the Movement for conscientious objectors, stated:

‘... The Movement of Conscientious Objectors has documented hundreds of individuals either seeking to withdraw their participation in aggressive military actions or striving to avoid military service altogether... In reaction to this surge of conscientious objectors, military commanders resorted to creating illicit detention centers, colloquially known as “cellars,” where those refusing frontline service are unlawfully detained, often under torturous conditions. Notable instances of such illegal detentions took place in Bryanka in July and Zaitsevo in November 2022, with approximately 300 individuals unlawfully held in each camp. To date, over 13 such camps, officially termed as Psychological Rehabilitation Centers by Russian authorities, have been

²³⁰ EUAA, [‘The Russian Federation – Military service’](#) (page 61 to 62), December 2022

²³¹ The Insider, [“Lena, they might shoot me today.”...](#), 7 November 2022

²³² The Guardian, [‘Russian soldiers say commanders used ‘barrier troops’...](#)’, 27 March 2023

identified. The conditions for alternative civilian service within Russia remain punitive and discriminatory, typified by extended terms, poor living conditions, and low remuneration.²³³

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17.5 Oversight

17.5.1 The USSD human rights report for 2022 also noted:

‘While prisoners may file complaints with public oversight commissions or with the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsperson, they often did not do so due to fear of reprisal. Prison reform activists reported that only prisoners who believed they had no other option risked the consequences of filing a complaint. Complaints that reached the oversight commissions often focused on minor personal requests.

‘Convicted inmates and individuals in pretrial detention have visitation rights, but authorities may deny visitation depending on circumstances. By law prisoners with harsher sentences are allowed fewer visitation rights. The judge in a prisoner’s case may deny the prisoner visitation. Authorities may also prohibit relatives deemed a security risk from visiting prisoners. Some pretrial detainees believed authorities sometimes denied visitation and telephone access to pressure them into providing confessions.’²³⁴

17.5.2 The USSD also observed:

‘Authorities permitted representatives of public oversight commissions to visit prisons regularly to monitor conditions. According to the Public Chamber, there were public oversight commissions in almost all regions. Human rights activists expressed concern that some members of the commissions were individuals close to authorities and included persons with law enforcement backgrounds. Officials allegedly transferred some high-profile prisoners to penal colonies far from major cities where access and visitation is significantly more difficult.

‘By law members of oversight commissions have the right to videotape and photograph inmates in detention facilities and prisons with their written approval. Commission members may also collect air samples, conduct other environmental inspections, conduct safety evaluations, and access prison psychiatric facilities. The law permits human rights activists not listed in public oversight commissions to visit detentions centers and prisons. The NGO Interregional Center for Women’s Support, working with detained migrants, noted that only after a specific detainee submits a request and contacts the NGO may the organization obtain permission to visit a given detention center.

‘Authorities allowed the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture to visit the country’s prisons and release some reports on conditions but continued to withhold permission for it to release all recent reports.’²³⁵

17.5.3 The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of information report,

²³³ ECBO, [‘Annual Report – Conscientious Objection to Military...’](#) (pages 66 to 67), 12 May 2023

²³⁴ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia’](#) (section 1c), 20 March 2023

²³⁵ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia’](#) (section 1c), 20 March 2023

covering events in 2022 and early 2023, released in March 2023, citing various sources (Dutch MFA report 2023) noted:

‘To monitor detention conditions, Russia had already established a system of local Public Oversight Committees (POC) in 2008. The POCs are made up of volunteers and have the legal task of publicly monitoring detention conditions, writing reports and recommendations based on those conditions and supporting cooperation between NGOs on the one hand and detention facilities and governments on the other hand. POCs have the right to visit detention facilities, address detainee complaints in recommendations and communicate about their work in the media and in state institutions. Since February 2020, the POCs have also had the right to visit custodial clinics.⁷⁶⁵

‘Criticism of the POC mainly relates to the selection criteria and selection procedure for members of the POCs, the independence of the members and the non-binding nature of their advice. For example, people who have been designated as a ‘foreign agent’ cannot take a seat in the POC.⁷⁶⁶ The Committee for Prevention of Torture, a Russian NGO engaged in combatting abuse in detention, was again designated a ‘foreign agent’ in 2022. In 2015, the NGO, then still active under a different legal form, was also classified as a “foreign agent”.⁷⁶⁷²³⁶

- 17.5.4 For further information on conditions in detention in areas controlled by Russian armed forces see: [UN Human Rights Council \(formerly UN Commission on Human Rights\): Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine](#) published 15 March 2023

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18. Violations of basic rules of conduct

18.1 International humanitarian law

18.1.1 The Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts (RULAC), a project of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights is an online portal which identifies and classifies situations of armed conflict, provides information on the parties to these conflicts, and applicable international law²³⁷.

18.1.2 RULAC explained explains that ‘International humanitarian law applies only to armed conflicts’²³⁸ and noted in its update on applicable international law that: ‘Both Russia and Ukraine are parties to the [four 1949 Geneva Conventions](#) and the [1977 Additional Protocol I](#). In addition, they are bound by customary international humanitarian law applicable to international armed conflicts. In addition to international humanitarian law, [international human rights law](#) continues to apply during times of armed conflict.’²³⁹

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²³⁶ Dutch MFA, ‘[Country of origin information report – Russian Federation](#)’ (page 104), 31 March 2023

²³⁷ RULAC, ‘[About RULAC](#)’, last updated 5 July 2022

²³⁸ RULAC, ‘[International humanitarian law](#)’, no date

²³⁹ RULAC, ‘[International armed conflict in Ukraine](#)’, updated 8 February 2023

18.2 Russian law

18.2.1 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources stated:

‘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... 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... The 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...’²⁴⁰

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18.3 Violations of international law

18.3.1 [The EUAA Military service report](#) documents violations of humanitarian and international human rights law by Russian military forces in Ukraine between February 2022 and November 2022.

18.3.2 An EUAA COI query from February 2023, citing a range of sources, stated:

‘During the invasion of Ukraine, which started on 24 February 2022, the Russian military forces conducted excessive shelling of civilian infrastructure... and committed numerous atrocities toward civilians,... including killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, and enforced disappearances of Ukrainian civilians... as well as forced deportations of the civilian population to Russia and Russia-occupied territories in Ukraine. ... According to UN OHCHR, ... 7,199 Ukrainian civilians were killed and 11,756 injured from 24 February to 13 February 2023...’²⁴¹

18.3.3 Human Rights Watch observed in its annual report on the situation in Ukraine during 2022:

‘Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24 and the ensuing war had a disastrous impact on civilians, civilian property and energy infrastructure, and overshadowed all other human rights concerns in the country. Russian forces committed a litany of violations of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing and shelling of civilian areas that hit homes and healthcare and educational facilities. In areas they occupied, Russian or Russian-affiliated forces committed apparent war crimes, including torture, summary executions, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances. Those who attempted to flee areas of fighting faced terrifying ordeals and numerous obstacles; in some cases, Russian forces forcibly transferred significant numbers of Ukrainians to Russia or Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine and subjected many to abusive security screenings.’²⁴²

²⁴⁰ EUAA, [‘Major developments in the Russian Federations...’](#) (page 3-4), 17 February 2023

²⁴¹ EUAA, [‘Major developments in the Russian Federations...’](#) (page 2), 17 February 2023

²⁴² HRW, [‘Ukraine – Events of 2022’](#), January 2023

18.3.4 Similarly, Freedom House in its report on events in Ukraine in 2022 noted:

‘The Russian armed forces launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, inflicting massive civilian and military casualties and destroying civilian infrastructure. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced from their homes, and Russian troops have engaged in extrajudicial executions, torture, and sexual violence against local residents. In areas subjected to longer periods of occupation, Russian authorities have used intimidation, arbitrary detention, and torture to assert control over political expression, the education system, and many other aspects of civilian life.’²⁴³

18.3.5 The USSD human rights report covering events in Ukraine in 2022 noted:

‘[Russia]... launched an unlawful and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine, resulting in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other atrocities committed by members of Russia’s forces. International organizations and nongovernmental organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, issued periodic reports documenting abuses committed by Russia’s forces during the war; however, Russia’s forces and their proxies throughout the war methodically obstructed, harassed, and intimidated international monitors denying them sufficient access.

‘Following the start of its full-scale invasion in February, Russia’s forces continued to escalate attacks on civilians. Russia mobilized, armed, trained, and led proxy forces from territories under its occupation (including parts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya oblasts and Crimea). Through the end of the year, Russia’s forces continued to conduct hostilities, including launching missile and drone strikes throughout Ukraine, hitting critical infrastructure, including power, water, and heating facilities. They struck at least 261 hospitals and clinics as well as 501 schools by December. Amnesty International and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe characterized these attacks as relentless and indiscriminate; during the year, more than 13 million residents were displaced and thousands of civilians killed, including 429 confirmed deaths among children, with experts assessing the actual number was likely much higher. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that widespread attacks by Russia’s forces against critical infrastructure during the coldest months of the year caused the humanitarian situation to further deteriorate, leading to mass displacement of civilians.

‘Serious human rights abuses committed by Russia’s forces in occupied areas involved severe and wide-ranging cases and included credible reports of: mass and unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; forced disappearances; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, including of children; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees, particularly during “filtration” operations involving interrogation, torture, forced separation of families, forced deportation and adoptions of Ukraine’s children to Russian families; unjust interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses of a relative;

²⁴³ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Ukraine](#)’, 9 March 2023

serious abuses in a conflict, including atrocities, abductions, torture and physical abuses...'²⁴⁴

- 18.3.6 The USSD human rights report covering events in Russia 2022 also noted Russian forces had committed human rights violations in Ukraine (and elsewhere):

‘Significant human rights issues in the occupied areas included credible reports of egregious cases of: crimes against humanity; war crimes; unlawful and mass killings, including by Russia’s forces or Russia-led proxies; enforced disappearances by Russia’s forces or Russia-led proxies; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by Russia’s forces or Russia-led proxies, including punitive psychiatric incarceration; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions and transfer of prisoners to Russia; unjust detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the occupation judiciary; unjust interference with privacy; serious abuses in a conflict, including attacks on civilian infrastructure and cities, resulting in widespread civilian death, torture, or physical abuse; ...

‘Since 2015, Russia’s armed forces have conducted military operations, including airstrikes, in the conflict in Syria. According to human rights organizations, the country’s forces took actions, such as bombing urban areas, that intentionally targeted civilian infrastructure, civilians, and humanitarian workers... Since 2017, Russia has provided the Central African Republic Army unarmed military advisors under the auspices of parameters established by the UN Security Council sanctions regime. According to Human Rights Watch, Russian armed forces and Russian proxies committed grave abuses against civilians with complete impunity, including summarily executing, torturing, and beating civilians...

‘In recent years, members of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group have also been deployed to other countries in the Middle East and Africa, including to Yemen, Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mali, where they were also linked to reported human rights abuses.’²⁴⁵

- 18.3.7 The USSD HR report 2023 continued: ‘There were reports that Russian forces, Russia-led forces, Russian proxies, and Russian occupation authorities in Ukraine, engaged in torture, including rape...’²⁴⁶

- 18.3.8 The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) in a report on prisoners of war (POW) in the Ukraine/Russian conflict dated 15 November 2022 (HRMMU POW report November 2022), and based on information received through interviews with POWs, witnesses and relatives of service personnel, reported that POW from both sides have experienced torture and ill-treatment. With regard Russian POWs the report stated:

‘The vast majority of those we interviewed told us that during their internment they were tortured and ill-treated. Torture and ill-treatment were not only used to coerce prisoners of war to give military information or statements about alleged crimes. They were, interviewees said, used on a daily basis to

²⁴⁴ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices...’](#) (Executive summary), 20 March 2023

²⁴⁵ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia’](#) (section 1), 20 March 2023

²⁴⁶ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Russia’](#) (section 1), 20 March 2023

intimidate and humiliate them. Prisoners of war described being beaten, including with batons and wooden hammers, kicked, and given electric shocks with Tasers and a military phone known as TAPik.

'Immediately upon capture, some were beaten or had their personal belongings pillaged. The prisoners of war were then transported to places of internment in a manner that raises concerns. They were often taken in overcrowded trucks or buses, and sometimes lacked access to water or toilets for more than a day. Their hands were tied and eyes covered so tightly with duct tape that it left wounds on their wrists and faces.

'Upon arrival at certain places of internment, prisoners of war were subjected to so-called 'admission procedures', which frequently involved prolonged beatings, threats, dog attacks, being stripped and put into stress positions. Witnesses told us about the death of at least one prisoner of war during an 'admission procedure' in the penal colony near Olenivka in mid-April 2022. We have received information about eight other such alleged deaths there in April 2022 and we are working to corroborate them.'²⁴⁷

- 18.3.9 The UN Human Rights Council on 4 March 2022 established 'an Independent International Commission of Inquiry [IICIU] to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, and related crimes in the context of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine.' To undertake its investigations, the Commission

'... travelled eight times to Ukraine and visited 56 cities, towns, and settlements. It also travelled to Estonia and Georgia to meet people who fled from areas affected by the armed conflict. The Commission conducted 610 interviews with 595 persons (348 women and 247 men) in person and remotely; inspected sites of destruction, graves, places of detention and torture, as well as weapon remnants; and consulted documents, photographs, satellite imagery and videos.

'... The Commission... regrets that its attempts to establish meaningful communication with the Russian Federation have been unsuccessful, as its notes verbales and letters have remained unanswered. A Russian governmental institution has referred material to the Commission, which it has examined.'²⁴⁸

- 18.3.10 The IICIU, in its March 2023 report, outlined its main findings in its summary

'The body of evidence collected shows that Russian authorities have committed a wide range of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in many regions of Ukraine and in the Russian Federation. Many of these amount to war crimes and include wilful killings, attacks on civilians, unlawful confinement, torture, rape, and forced transfers and deportations of children.

'The Commission has concluded that Russian armed forces have carried out attacks with explosive weapons in populated areas with an apparent disregard for civilian harm and suffering. It has documented indiscriminate

²⁴⁷ UN - HRMMU, '[Ukraine/Russia: Prisoners of war](#)', 15 November 2022

²⁴⁸ UNHRC, '[IICIU report 2023](#)' (paragraph 1 and 4), 16 March 2023

and disproportionate attacks, and a failure to take precautions, in violation of international humanitarian law.

'In addition, the Commission has found that the Russian armed forces' waves of attacks, starting 10 October 2022, on Ukraine's energy-related infrastructure and the use of torture by Russian authorities may amount to crimes against humanity. It recommends further investigations.'²⁴⁹

18.3.11 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty stated in an article from February 2023:

'Germany's prosecutor-general said on February 5 that his office had collected "hundreds" of pieces of evidence showing war crimes by Russian forces in Ukraine, calling for an international effort to bring leaders to justice. "At the moment we are focusing on mass killings in Bucha and attacks on Ukraine's civil infrastructure," prosecutor Peter Frank told the Welt am Sonntag newspaper. He said the goal was now to "prepare for a possible later court case -- whether in Germany or with our foreign partners or an international court."²⁵⁰

18.3.12 '[War crimes Watch](#)' Ukraine has an online tracker which documents potential war crimes in Ukraine. Data is gathered and verified by the Associated Press (AP) and FRONTLINE and include 'direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure... From February 2022 to February 2023 AP and FRONTLINE verified 653 events involving potential war crimes.'²⁵¹

18.3.13 The ICIU in its report of March 2023 stated:

'Russian authorities have committed a wide range of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in various regions of Ukraine, many of which amount to war crimes...

'The war crimes include attacks on civilians and energy-related infrastructure, wilful killings, unlawful confinement, torture, rape and other sexual violence, as well as unlawful transfers and deportations of children.

'The Commission's evidence shows that in areas that came under their control, Russian authorities have committed wilful killings of civilians or persons not involved in fighting (hors de combat), which are war crimes and violations of the right to life...'²⁵²

18.3.14 The [International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#) in a press release dated 17 March 2023 announced that arrest warrants had been issued for Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Commissioner for Children's Rights Ms Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova. It is alleged that:

'Mr Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, ..., President of the Russian Federation, is allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation...

'Ms Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, born on 25 October 1984, Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the

²⁴⁹ UNHRC, [ICIU report 2023](#) (Summary), 16 March 2023

²⁵⁰ RFE/RL, '[Germany Has 'Hundreds' Of Pieces Of Ukraine War Crime Evidence](#)', 5 February 2023

²⁵¹ War Crimes Watch Ukraine, [War crimes tracker](#), no date

²⁵² OHCHR, '[War crimes, indiscriminate attacks on infrastructure, systematic...](#)', 16 March 2023

Russian Federation, is allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

'The crimes [of both Putin and Lvova-Belova] were allegedly committed in Ukrainian occupied territory at least from 24 February 2022....'²⁵³

18.3.15 A UN press release from the Special Rapporteur on Torture of 15 June 2023 noted:

'The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Alice Jill Edwards today expressed alarm at reports and testimonies which appear to indicate that Russian military forces in Ukraine are consistently and intentionally inflicting severe physical and psychological pain and suffering on Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war.

'This torture is allegedly being carried out to extract intelligence or to force confessions from detained individuals, or because of their former membership or support of the Ukrainian armed forces, Edwards said in a letter to the Russian Federation.

“The alleged practices include electric shocks, beatings, hooding, mock executions and other threats of death,” the UN expert said. “If established, they would constitute individual violations and may also amount to a pattern of State-endorsed torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

'The allegations relate to the detention of Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war held in grossly inadequate conditions in facilities run by Russian military forces inside Ukraine. In the letter, sent jointly with other independent UN experts, Edwards said that the consistency and methods of the alleged torture suggests “a level of coordination, planning and organisation, as well as the direct authorisation, deliberate policy or official tolerance from superior authorities.”²⁵⁴

18.3.16 Detail of violations of humanitarian law is set out in the IICIU report. Additionally, the UN Mission to Ukraine's regular reports on the human rights situation as a result of the conflict, including of acts in violation of humanitarian law including:

- [Report on the Human Rights situation in Ukraine 1 February – 31 July 2022](#), published 27 September 2022
- [Update on the human rights situation in Ukraine 1 August - to 31 October 2022](#), 6 December 2022
- [UN Human Rights Council \(formerly UN Commission on Human Rights\): Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine](#) published 15 March 2023
- [OHCHR report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Persons Hors](#)

²⁵³ ICC, '[ICC judges issue arrest warrants...](#)', 17 March 2023

²⁵⁴ UN Media Center, Press release, '[Widespread use of torture...](#)', 15 June 2023

[de Combat in the Context of the Armed Attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine: 24 February 2022 – 23 February 2023](#), published 24 March 2023

- [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023](#), published 24 March 2023
- [Update on the human rights situation in Ukraine:1 February — 30 April 2023](#), 16 June 2023

18.3.17 For information about the impact of the war on Ukraine, see [Ukraine Country Policy and Information Notes on Security situation and Humanitarian situation](#).

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Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

All the COI included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s). Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared and contrasted to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of the issues relevant to the basis of claim of this note and forms the basis for the [country information section](#).

The Home Office's CPIT uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Legal context
 - Legislation Constitution
 - Size of military
- Conscription
 - Eligibility – age, gender
 - Length of service
 - Procedures
- Exemptions
 - Grounds for exemption including age, study, medical, nationality
 - Conscientious objection
 - Exclusion from service
- Undertaking military service
 - Deployment and roles
 - Ukraine
 - Conditions of service and treatment of conscripts
- Evasion, desertion and conscientious objection
 - Legislation – penalties and convictions
 - Legal consequences
 - Practical consequences i.e. travel/passport
 - Prison conditions
- Treatment
- Conditions of service
- Abuses by security forces
 - War crimes
 - Crimes against humanity

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **25 July 2023**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

New country policy and information note with executive summary.

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Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

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Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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