

3.8.2. Situation of women in the North Caucasus

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In the North Caucasus, women face ‘pervasive gender-based violence’,⁶³⁴ including ‘honour killings’⁶³⁵ and early⁶³⁶ and forced marriages.’⁶³⁷ According to the UN Special Rapporteur, Mariana Katzarova, these practices are particularly reported in Chechnya and Dagestan.⁶³⁸ As reported by NGO Equality Now in October 2024, the majority of early marriages in the North Caucasus remain unregistered, with families involved in cases of kidnapping, rape, or forced marriage prioritising ‘familial and clan honour’ and relying on traditional mediation by imams, who ‘continue to officiate marriage involving minors.’⁶³⁹ In 2021, child marriages affected 4 453 girls and 614 boys under the age of 18, with the highest number of cases reported in Dagestan and the Stavropol region.⁶⁴⁰

As noted by Caucasian Knot, in the North Caucasus, women whose behaviour is viewed as bringing ‘a disgrace to their family’ may become victims of ‘honour killings,’ committed by their relatives, most often fathers or brothers.⁶⁴¹ ‘Disgrace’ usually refers to sexual conduct forbidden in the culture of the region, such as adultery, pre-marital sex, rape, or homosexual relations. However, complaining about a physically abusive husband or ‘improper behaviour’ in daily life activities, including choice of clothing, can likewise lead to ‘honour killing.’⁶⁴² In an interview with the EUAA, OVD-Info noted that ‘honour killings’ mostly concern women who try to flee domestic violence.⁶⁴³

In December 2023, Caucasian Knot reported that out of 31 convictions for the killings of women in Chechnya in 2022 – 2023, 22 were ‘honour killings’, as the text of the court ruling referred to such terms ‘immoral behaviour’, ‘shame,’ ‘honour’, ‘reputation’, and ‘according to our traditions.’⁶⁴⁴ In February 2025, a Chechen man who in 2024 killed his 22-year-old daughter-in-law justifying the killing during the investigation by her ‘immoral behaviour’ reportedly signed a military contract to fight in Ukraine.⁶⁴⁵ Media sources reported prevalence of domestic violence against women⁶⁴⁶ and occurrence of ‘honour killings’ in Ingushetia.⁶⁴⁷ Regarding Dagestan, experts consulted by Caucasian Knot in October 2025 noted that ‘honour killings’ there are rare but not exceptional cases. Moreover, the experts stated that the scale and dynamics of ‘honour killings’ in the North Caucasus is impossible to assess due to a lack of official statistics, as the authorities either do not record such crimes or conceal them.⁶⁴⁸ Marianna Muravyeva similarly noted that the Russian authorities do not speak about ‘honour killings.’⁶⁴⁹

While domestic violence in Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan ‘affects women of all ages,’ it is mainly women under 30 who try to flee their families.⁶⁵⁰ As noted by Caucasian Knot, fleeing is often ‘the only chance to save their lives’ for women facing domestic violence. Many women leave the North Caucasus for other parts of Russia, while others leave the country.⁶⁵¹ As noted by a lawyer, interviewed by RFE/RL service Kavkaz.Realii in June 2023, women should cut all ties with their families to protect themselves from ‘honour killings.’⁶⁵²

As noted by Marianna Muravyeva, many women flee to nearby regions, particularly to the city of Rostov-on-Don, the closest city to the North Caucasus. The expert further noted that ‘many cases’ of ‘honour killings’ originate from Rostov-on-Don courts, since men travel there to find and punish their wives and daughters who have defied family order. Many women hide from their families, with their situation becoming

particularly dangerous if they take their children with them. In Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan, women often leave their children behind to survive. Those who flee with children, particularly if they are boys and in cases of fleeing from Chechnya, ‘have no chance of survival’,⁶⁵³ as in the North Caucasus, the children are considered to belong to the father’s family.⁶⁵⁴

As noted by Caucasian Knot, the authorities and security forces in the North Caucasus often ‘take the side of family aggressors,’⁶⁵⁵ particularly in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya, whereas in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia, as reported in November 2023, law enforcement was reportedly ‘less involved in persecuting victims of domestic violence.’⁶⁵⁶

In Chechnya, under the rule of Ramzan Kadyrov, as noted by Mediazona, domestic violence has been ‘effectively institutionalised,’ with the authorities encouraging ‘the idea that women’s lives must be strictly controlled by male relatives’ and using the notion of family honour to justify violence toward women, including ‘honour killings.’⁶⁵⁷ According to the head of the ‘Fathers and Daughters’ project Aida Mirmaksumova, cited by Caucasus Knot, mistrust remains a main factor preventing women in Chechnya from seeking help.⁶⁵⁸

A lawyer specialising in LGBTIQ issues noted to the EUAA that the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) exists in Dagestan.⁶⁵⁹ No further information within the reference period of the report could be found regarding the scale of this practice.

In October 2025, Novaya Gazeta noted that ‘cases of Chechen women who have fled domestic violence or arranged marriages being coerced or forcibly returned home are not uncommon.’⁶⁶⁰ OVD-Info noted that they have documented several cases where women were abducted and forcefully returned to Chechnya and Dagestan.⁶⁶¹ According to a lawyer specialising in LGBTIQ issues, forced returns of young women perceived as exhibiting transgressive behaviour to Chechnya are usually organised by family members and typically involve deception and physical violence. In some cases, relatives, with the assistance of law-enforcement authorities, confiscate their identity documents; if a woman manages to leave home and attempts to obtain new documents, law enforcement notify her family and hand the documents over to ‘a male relative or senior women’ in the family.⁶⁶²

In August 2023, a Chechen woman was abducted in St. Petersburg, where she had fled to avoid a forced marriage in 2022, and forcibly returned to her family in Chechnya,⁶⁶³ with the assistance of law enforcement officials.⁶⁶⁴ In June 2025, the MoI placed her on the list of missing persons, with human rights defenders presuming she was killed in a ‘honour killing’ ‘for her disobedience.’⁶⁶⁵ In July 2025, a 24-year-old Chechen woman who fled ‘abusive and controlling’ family was reportedly ‘briefly abducted’ in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, where she was staying under ‘the protective order,’ ‘by her sister and five other people’, identified as Chechens.⁶⁶⁶ With the help of women rights organisations, the woman was reportedly able to escape again.⁶⁶⁷

In October 2025, a 23-year-old⁶⁶⁸ Chechen woman who fled to Armenia to escape domestic violence was found dead in Yerevan⁶⁶⁹ in a suspected ‘honour killing.’⁶⁷⁰ Women rights activists reported that she went missing after going out to meet a woman she had befriended on Instagram, whose followers included people close to Ramzan Kadyrov.⁶⁷¹ Like many other Chechens who have fled Chechnya, she reportedly had been receiving treats.⁶⁷²

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