

On behalf of the Russian LGBT Network, I want to express grave concern about violence against lesbian, bisexual, and queer women in the North Caucasus, specifically in the Chechen Republic. Since April 2017 the Russian LGBT Network assisted 37 young women from the North Caucasus, who require national and international protection; the Network has registered an influx of requests since late 2018. The violence human rights violations directed at them originate in the kinship structures fueled with neotraditionalist rhetoric, regarding women as a child-like figure, stripped of decision-making rights over her being. However, while LBQ women are rarely subjected to the so-called “conventional” mistreatment from the law enforcement officers and agencies, law enforcement officers partake and support the heteropatriarchal discourses through restricting LBQ women’s fundamental freedoms.

Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women in Chechnya are subjected to grave human rights violations. Their families exercise physical, sexual, and sexualized violence; these women are threatened and blackmailed by their older male relatives. Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women permanently become the victims of correctional rape and forced marriages, including, in some cases, even child marriages.

It is common for the relatives of LBQ women to subject them to violent exorcism-like procedures, that include verbal violence and severe beatings by religious officials in Chechnya. The families submit their lesbian, bisexual, or queer female relatives to psychiatric facilities. In these facilities, unscrupulous medical professional misdiagnose these women with schizophrenia and heavily medicate them, harming their physical and mental state. Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women often become the victims of honor killings. In 2017 the Russian LGBT Network lost Luiza Nazaeva a young woman, who was abducted, returned to Chechnya and killed.

I want to voice yet another concern about the fact that lesbian, bisexual, and queer women of Chechen origin, who reside/previously received refuge in the EU member states are being abducted from the EU-member state and brought to Chechnya despite their will. The families of these women do this. In Chechnya, LBQ women are physically abused by their relatives and are forcibly married to Chechen man chosen by the family. The Network is aware of at least four similar cases, of Chechen families residing in the EU “returning” their children to the Chechen Republic.

The law enforcement officials support the kinship-produced violence against lesbian, bisexual, and queer women in the Chechen Republic, helping families to enhance surveillance over queer women. The involvement of the Chechen law enforcement agencies restricts the ability of these women to operate freely in Russia in case they get a chance to escape. In instances where the police track these women down, they are detained and transferred back to the Chechen Republic, where the police pass them to the families. Given the widespread tradition on honor-based crimes in the Chechen Republic, there are high risks of LBQ women being executed when they are forced to return to Chechnya.

Given the troubling situation of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women in the Chechen Republic, I call for the Russian Federation to finally acknowledge grave violations of LGBT rights in the Chechen Republic and start working to ensure immediate protection of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women in the Chechen Republic. Based on the recent European Court for Human Rights Decision on Volodina VS Russian Federation, I call for the Russian Federation to ratify Istanbul Convention, to criminalize domestic violence, and to ensure the rule of law in the Chechen Republic and other areas of the North Caucasus.