



Report about Chechen Refugees in Turkey and Georgia

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Summary

This report provides a summary about the political and social situation of Chechen refugees in Turkey and Georgia.

While doing my internship at Borderline Europe, Berlin/Germany the idea was to make a narrow research about Chechen refugees in Europe, which turned into the question of how they come to Europe.

The main aim of this report is to examine the current situation of Chechen refugees living as migrants, asylum seeker, and refugee in Turkey and Georgia. Due to political, geographical and religious reasons, both countries are prominent for Chechen Diaspora. The report focuses only on the time after the war in Chechnya and on the living-conditions for Chechen refugees in Turkey and Georgia. For the research, different sources have been used, mainly taken from Turkish, Russian webpages, as well as publications of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDCM).

By analyzing the situation of Chechen refugees in Turkey and Georgia, it becomes evident that two aspects need to be taken into consideration. Besides the humanitarian perspective, political implications are influencing the living-conditions for the refugees. For strategic and diplomatic reasons, the treatment of Chechen refugees is a highly polarised subject between Russia, Turkey and Georgia. This report therefore aims to include social, political and religious factors into the analysis.



Consequently, this report is structured in two main parts, examining first the situation in Turkey and secondly in Georgia.

What does it mean being a Chechen refugee in Turkey?

Turkey fulfills a center-role for various migratory routes and receives migrants from the Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe and parts of Africa. Since the beginning of the year 2000, after the second Chechen War started, the number of Chechen refugees coming to Turkey increased. They are hosted in non-official camps in Istanbul called Fenerbahce (184 inhabitants), Umraniye (152 inhabitants) and Beykoz (114 inhabitants). There are also rented and charity houses in Istanbul hosting 335 Chechen asylum seekers. All of these refugee camps are inappropriate for residence. Refugees are living in shacks self constructed out of available material such as corrugated iron sheets. None of them is isolated against heat or cold, some roofs are leaking. Electricity is affected by frequent power cuts. Family members have to share a very limited space, often living with several persons in only one room.

The Chechen refugees living in Turkey do not have any sort of permanent official status under law, including official refugee status. The only official right provided for them is a temporary residence permit. Every six month they have to apply for a costly renewal. Consequently, they are deprived of many basic human rights such as employment, education and health care. Thus, a contradiction is striking: While legal work without work permit is impossible, Chechen refugees do not receive state funding apart from the place to live in the camps, temporary electricity and a meal once per day. Health care, clothing schooling and additional meals are not included and thus missing.

Especially health care plays an important role due to the fact, that many of the refugees are severely traumatized by war-experiences. Consequently, there is an augmented need for professional psychological treatment in the camps.

In addition, the murders of three refugees during the last year increased the feeling of insecurity in the community.



Regional institutions such as the EU, the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe call for progress for refugees in Turkey. In his most recent report in 2009, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights underlined the need for a comprehensive plan to address the socio-economic problems faced by refugees and to ensure “sustainable durable solutions. (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Publication “Global Overview: Turkey Europe” 2010 opt.cit p1).

Different sources underline the need for a comprehensive plan to address the socio-economic problems faced by Chechen refugees (Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009 American International Journal of Contemporary Research Vol. 2 No. 3; March 2012 161 Non-Discriminatory and Inclusive Approaches: A Case Study of Chechen Migrant Children in Istanbul H. Ozden Bademci Ph.D.1 Oznur Acicbe MA2 p1-2).

Chechen Camps

As a result of Russia's repressions and persecutions in Chechnya, these Chechens took shelter in Turkey because they see Turkey as a brother country. However, they continue their lives under difficult conditions in Turkey. They have neither "citizenship" or "refugee status" here and they are just called "guests". For this reason, they fight with problems of education, health and working rights, as well as housing difficulties. Right now, there are three non-official Chechen refugee camps in Istanbul, Turkey. They are located in the Beykoz, Fenerbahce and Umraniye districts of the city. Around 500 Chechen refugees live in these camps. Many of the Chechen children in the camps were born in Turkey. However, they do not have any identification papers. The world of these children is limited by the walls of these camps.

Beykoz Chechen Refugee Camp is located in Tokatkoy area, one of the back roads of the Beykoz district in Istanbul. It is an apartment building.

Umraniye Chechen Refugee Camp is located in a hospice under Halil-ur-Rakhman Mosque in the Umraniye district of Istanbul. The living conditions are worse than Beykoz. The rooms are around 20 meters square and 7 or 8 people live in a room. The toilets and baths are common for the whole



camp. The people share clothes and if there is more than needed, they wash and sell them at a street bazaar. In this way, each family in the camp can earn 30-40 Turkish liras (15-20 Euros) in a month. Fenerbahce camp is located between one of most luxurious districts in Istanbul. The camp is situated between a Military Officers' Club on the left and a marina on the right. The camp may have one of the best views in Istanbul. It was originally a holiday camp for Turkish Rail Road workers, but it has been used for Chechen refugees since 2000. Along with similar problems to other camps, the strong wind which comes from the sea and dense moisture create bigger problems. Each shed is around 10-15 square meters. Also, they do not have a heating system here. ("Yeni Aktuel", a Turkish magazine, published a long article in issue number 231. The article has covered the problems of Chechen refugees in Turkey (<http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2010/11/27/12973.shtml>)

There are certain problems that Chechen refugees face in Turkey:

Working Permit: The biggest problem of the Chechen refugees in Turkey is that they cannot work and cannot earn money. Young people rarely find daily or weekly jobs. Even so, employers pay less money for Chechens than Turkish workers, it is about a 50% difference.

Health: They do not have any official status and for this reason they cannot go to the hospital or receive medication.

Education: The children can go to school until the end of high school, but they continue their education as "guest students". This means that they cannot receive diplomas.

Passport: Many of them would like to go European countries but their passports have expired, thus they cannot move anywhere. Even if they could manage to extend their passports, they might have problems in the airports because Turkish border guards would demand ridiculous payments for their illegal residence in Turkey throughout the year (Ibid, <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2010/11/27/12973.shtml> last seen 22 of April 2012),

Chechen Refugees in Georgia: Live in a danger or leave safe!



In the beginning of the second Russian-Chechen war, between 1999-2000, nearly 8,000 Chechen civilians fled to Georgia. Most of them stayed in the villages of the Pankisi valley where the Kists, relatives of the Chechens, live. Since then, many of the Chechen refugees have moved to third party countries in Europe, some of them have returned to Chechnya and some of them obtained Georgian citizenship. According to official statistics, little more than 500 Chechen refugees live in Georgia today. However, many of them still hope to leave Georgia to find a more prosperous life. According to the Chechen refugees, unemployment is the main reason that many of them want to go abroad in search of better lives. According to the head of the UNHCR mission, the UN is trying to help the region's development and improve the entire population of the Pankisi valley where 12% of the population lives in extreme poverty. (Future of Chechen Refugees in Georgia [http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=261%3Afuture ofchechen-refugees-in-georgia&catid=63%3Agenocide&Itemid=100](http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=261%3Afuture%20of%20chechen-refugees-in-georgia&catid=63%3Agenocide&Itemid=100) last seen 1 of May 2012).

From legal perspective Georgia ratified the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto. The arrival of refugees from Chechnya to Georgia in autumn 1999 was a test for the implementation of the Geneva Convention. UNHCR representatives were satisfied with the way in which Georgia granted asylum to these refugees, in application of the Geneva Convention. The total number of Chechen refugees in Georgia according to official figures is approximately 6,000-8,000, most of them are living in eight villages of the Pankisi gorge. Nearly all of these refugees live with families of the local Kist population of the gorge, that is ethnic Chechens who have been living in the Pankisi Gorge for 300 years and are Georgian citizens.

Georgia is not able to provide these refugees with appropriate socio-economical conditions, which is explained by the fact that as it already counts 300,000 IDPs from Abkhazia and 70,000 from South Ossetia. The UNHCR and some international NGOs opened field offices in the regional centre Akhmeta, from where they provide the refugees with humanitarian aid and carry out psychosocial programs with the victims of the war in Chechnya. There are ongoing negotiations between Russia and Georgia on the issue of return of Chechen refugees to the Russian Federation. The refugees protest strongly against any proposal on their return to Russia, as they have no



guarantee of security in Chechnya under the Russian military presence. All the refugees whom we interviewed, expressed that they want to return home as soon as Russian military operations are ended in Chechnya, but at the moment they seek refugee status in a third safe country, as they do not feel secure in Georgia. Due to the insecurity they suffer in Georgia, refugees from Chechnya demand to go to a safe third country, but not to be returned to Russia. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international organizations, support this demand. (Chechen refugees in Georgia - Pankisi Gorge and Akhmeta <http://reliefweb.int/node/121110> last seen 29 of April 2012). The presence of Chechens in the region has soured relations in the past two years between Tbilisi and Moscow which accuses the Georgian authorities of being unable or unwilling to rein in separatist rebels using the gorge as a base. Moscow has been trying unsuccessfully to convince an estimated 170,000 Chechen refugees in the neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia to return to their homes. But the refugees are refusing, saying they are afraid for their safety in Chechnya, where Russian troops launched a self-declared anti-terrorist operation in October, 1999, and remain bogged down in a guerrilla conflict.(Putin orders return of Chechen refugees from Georgia <http://reliefweb.int/node/95396> last seen 29 of April 2012).

Conclusion

There are only three possibilities for refugees from Chechnya in the long-term:

- Voluntary Repatriation. The refugees voluntarily return to the Russian Federation
- Naturalization. The refugees become citizens of Georgia.
- Resettlement to a Third Country. Refugees, with the assistance from UNHCR and the host government, move permanently to a third country (Silence Kills: Abuse of Chechen Refugees in Georgia http://www.chechnyaadvocacy.org/refugees/Silence_kills.pdf).

Massive and repeated displacement within Russia and exile abroad have been among the most dramatic and historic consequences of the wars in Chechnya. Almost every Chechen has experienced displacement and the problems that come with it, such as poverty, cramped housing



and lives that have been disrupted and put on hold (Refugees and Diaspora <http://www.chechnyaadvocacy.org/refugees.html> last seen 30 of April 2012). It is still unsafe for Chechens to return to the Russian Federation, and it would not be advised that they do so. The UNHCR itself does not advocate that refugees return to the Russian Federation. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that the situation in Chechnya will improve much in the near future. Therefore, voluntary repatriation is not currently a viable solution for the remaining refugees in Georgia. Resettlement to a third country is generally done on a case-by-case basis with the decision ultimately resting with the host government and not with Georgia or the UNHCR. Between 2003 and 2005, nearly 300 refugees were resettled with the help of UNHCR to third countries – mainly to Sweden, which took over 70 percent, but also to Canada and elsewhere (Silence Kills: Abuse of Chechen Refugees in Georgia http://www.chechnyaadvocacy.org/refugees/Silence_kills.pdf).

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