

# Risk assessment

The risk environment in Russia for Western  
NGOs and foundations



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# Introduction

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The operating environment for human rights defenders and civil society activists in Russia has become even more constrained over 2014-15. Many activists have been subject to harassment and violence. In addition to those working on human rights issues, activists and journalists expressing alternative views on the conflict in Ukraine are at particular risk. Those opposing Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict can expect to be similarly targeted over the next year. Furthermore, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has repeatedly expressed his fear that Western countries use NGOs to manipulate Russian public opinion in order to stir up popular discontent and advance the foreign policy interests of their home countries.

This briefing sets out the general risk environment within which personnel from Western NGOs and foundations will be operating in Russia. The briefing is in three parts. The first part provides an overview of the current **Russian macro-environment**, including the political and economic situations and international relations. The second part offers a detailed **travel risk assessment** covering nine key areas, including terrorism, civil unrest, health and government surveillance. The final part details the **Russian legislation that can be used to curtail the activities of Western NGOs and foundations** operating within Russia or funding local NGOs.

This briefing is offered for information purposes only. Open Briefing can undertake detailed risk assessments specific to individual organisations and personnel. We can also specify a range of mitigation measures designed to reduce the risks to an acceptable level.

Working closely with our security consultant and trusted partners we are also able to offer NGOs and foundations various security and training packages that provide their personnel with the skills and support needed to operate safely and effectively within Russia or any other country, including hostile environments. Packages are made up of a number of complementary services in the following areas:

- Risk advisory
- Protective security
- Counter-intelligence
- Contingency plans
- Training
- Project security

The level of risk to Western NGOs or foundations operating in Russia is such that we recommend a bespoke risk assessment be carried out prior to any staff travelling to the country. We can then recommend bespoke mitigation and security measures. This is necessary to ensure the safety of staff and the success of any project.

# Part 1

## Macro-environment overview

Russia is the largest country in the world, stretching across nine time zones and encompassing hundreds of distinct ethnic groups in 83 federal republics, regions and districts. It is also the world's tenth most populous country, with around 143 million inhabitants. Russia is a major player on the world stage, and maintains a desire to achieve the dominance enjoyed by the Soviet Union. However, its influence has been diminished since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, which greatly increased tensions between Moscow and the West.

An overview of the current macro-environment in Russia is provided in the following pages in relation to:

- Political situation
- Economic situation
- Conflicts
- International relations

Table 1. Select social, political and economic rankings for Russia.

Social, political and economic rankings for Russia	
Index	Ranking
<b>Human development</b> (UN Development Programme, 2013)	<b>#57</b> out of 187 countries (0.778, high human development)
<b>Internet freedom</b> (Freedom House, 2014)	<b>Partly free</b> (60/100)
<b>Resource governance</b> (Revenue Watch Institute, 2013)	<b>#20</b> out of 58 countries (56/100, partial)
<b>Economic freedom</b> (Heritage Foundation, 2015)	<b>#143</b> out of 152 countries (52.1/100, mostly unfree)
<b>Civil and political freedoms</b> (Freedom House, 2015)	<b>Not free</b> (6/10)
<b>Press freedom</b> (Reporters without Borders, 2015)	<b>#152</b> out of 180 countries (44.97/100)
<b>Corruption perception</b> (Transparency International, 2014)	<b>#136</b> out of 175 countries (27/100)



## Political situation

The head of the Russian Federation is President Vladimir Putin, who is the primary driving force behind Russia's domestic and foreign policy. Putin has held this dominant role in Russian politics since first taking office as president in May 2000. Due to a limit on consecutive terms, Putin was forced to give up the presidency in 2008 to the current prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev; however, he returned to power in May 2012 after serving as prime minister himself for four years.

Putin's style of governance and prolonged time in office has prompted reproaches over the country's limited political freedom and poor human rights record. Despite international criticism, Putin maintains a relatively high level of popularity within the country. Russia's annexation of Crimea, which is seen by many Russians as the righting of an historical injustice, has greatly improved Putin's domestic approval ratings, further entrenching his position in office.

### Opposition movement

Although Russia has remained fairly stable under Putin's leadership, serious concerns have emerged in 2015 regarding the country's economic outlook amid continued sanctions imposed on the country and a sustained fall in oil prices (the government derives a majority of its federal budget from energy export revenues). Ordinary Russians are starting to feel the consequences of the deteriorating economic situation.

Protest action within Russia intensified after the 2011 legislative elections, when the so-called non-systemic opposition criticised the way the Central Election Commission handled the vote. The opposition's main rallying points are Russia's involvement in Ukraine, the economic downturn, corruption and the lack of political transparency. Currently, the opposition movement is particularly strong within the capital, Moscow. Protests take place from time to time, but they have diminished significantly in both frequency and participation.

Regional and municipal elections took place in a number of Russian federal subjects on 13 September 2015. The elections ended with few surprises, and once again confirmed the established four-party system in Russian politics, dominated by the ruling United Russia party. Putin's party won the governor's seat in all 21 regions where an election was held, as well as in 11 regional legislatures. The RPR-Parnas opposition party was allowed to run for a regional parliament in only one region, Kostroma, and polled just under 2% of the vote.

In the run up to the elections, Alexei Navalny, the most prominent opposition figure, formed a political alliance with other opposition leaders called the Democratic Coalition. It intended to participate in the regional elections in Novosibirsk, Kaluga and Kostroma oblasts and Magadan as a 'rehearsal' for the 2016 State Duma elections. However, it was blocked from the election in these regions. For instance, the Novosibirsk election commission refused to register the party list of the Democratic Coalition based on an alleged and unsubstantiated fabrication of signatures under a new law that was dubbed 'a law against Navalny'.

In the end, Democratic Choice won three seats in the Pskov Municipal Duma. The poor performance of the coalition can only be partly explained by the constraints imposed on it by the government. Despite a promise to engage with local activists, the opposition parties imposed candidates from Moscow that were well known nationally but detached from local politics. So far, the opposition's biggest weakness has been its inability to work together. Thus, the creation of the Democratic Coalition is the first successful step in consolidation of the opposition movement. However, the alliance remains fixated on running against United Russia, rather than advocating democratic values and fresh ideas.

The Russian authorities have employed detention as a means to get rid of political opponents. For instance, Yevgeny Urlashov, elected mayor of Yaroslavl in April 2012, was arrested on charges of bribery and extortion in July 2013. He based his election campaign on the slogan 'Against crooks and thieves', referring to the United Russia party. Although there is no strong reason to believe that he is innocent, it is fair to argue that the legal system in Russia works to the benefit of the Kremlin, so that justice only reaches those that fall out of its favour; those loyal to the government remain largely immune.

As it stands, the opposition movement has not threatened and is not anticipated to threaten the current status quo due to its internal weakness and the bureaucratic barriers to its performance.

## Economic situation

Russia's economic situation has been rapidly deteriorating since mid-2014. The ruble has been losing value at an unprecedented rate, inflation has been growing and foreign businesses have been pulling out their investments. Russia's financial crisis was caused by the slump in oil prices and by Western sanctions over the conflict in Ukraine that amplified the long-standing structural weaknesses of the Russian economic model.

Russia's budget is mostly supported by oil and gas, which makes the country's financial situation vulnerable to price fluctuations. In the 2000s, the Russian economy boomed, largely owing to strong revenues from oil and natural gas exports, which were highly priced at the time. The fall in oil prices in late 2014 contributed significantly to the country's deteriorating economic situation, highlighted by the largest day-on-day depreciation of the ruble in 16 years, which occurred on 15-16 December 2014.

The country's GDP is forecast to decline by 3-5% in 2015. Furthermore, Alexei Kudrin, a former Russian finance minister, warned that the devaluation of the currency could push inflation to a rate of 12-15% in 2015. The value of the Russian ruble is expected to remain weak compared to major currencies. Endemic corruption and excessive bureaucracy are major factors that limit international investment; however, the size of the Russian marketplace ensures that the country will continue to be attractive to investors despite these concerns.

Most of Russia's economic development is centred on Moscow, with many other regional urban centres continuing to struggle economically. Similarly, income distribution remains very uneven among the population.

Additionally, integrating Crimea into the Russian state may require large capital investments. The peninsula has been adapting to Russia's economic system since the takeover by Russia. To smooth the transition, Moscow poured enormous sums of money in subsidies into the region. In 2014, €125 billion (\$2 billion) were spent, and it is expected a minimum of €100 billion (\$1.7 billion) will have been allocated to Crimea's development over 2015. Despite this, Crimeans are experiencing price hikes greater than those in Russia. This is due to a drop in the flow of goods into the peninsula, as total imports declined by 86% and exports by 80% between January and October 2014.

## Conflicts

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation has been involved in a number of conflicts within and beyond its borders.

### **Chechen wars**

The Chechen wars comprised two campaigns: the First Chechen War of 1994-1996 and the Second Chechen War of 1999-2000. The conflicts broke out after Dzhokhar Dudayev, the Chechen president, unilaterally declared the succession of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria from the Soviet Union in late 1991. Moscow responded heavy-handedly, as by then most of the former Soviet republics had declared their independence and Russia was concerned about preserving its territorial integrity. The conflict garnered international attention for its brutality and the destruction of the capital city, Grozny. Fighting was largely limited to Chechnya; however, the conflict also affected neighbouring regions in the North Caucasus.

While Russia has significantly disabled the Chechen rebel movement, violence still occurs throughout the North Caucasus, especially in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Russian soldiers and intelligence operatives and local militia operate throughout the region, conducting frequent counterinsurgency operations. These often involve clashes in the region's larger urban centres, including Makhachkala, Nalchik, Nazran, Grozny, Magas, Vladikavkaz and Khasavyurt, but only occasionally result in significant casualties.

North Caucasus-based terrorist groups possess the intent and capability to undertake attacks outside their stronghold and target public infrastructure in Moscow and other major cities in western Russia. Examples of this include two suicide bombings on the Moscow metro in March 2010, an attack at Moscow's Domodedovo International Airport in January 2011 and a suicide bombing on a bus in Volgograd in October 2013.

### **South Ossetia and Abkhazia**

In August 2008, Russian forces joined separatist troops from the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in a brief war against Georgia. Although a ceasefire agreement was quickly reached, Russian troops remain in the two disputed regions as they attempt to consolidate their claims for independence and gain international recognition. Both regions are still widely considered to be part of Georgia; however, the prospect of Russian troops withdrawing from the breakaway regions and/or the territories being restored to Georgian authority appears increasingly unlikely.

The Russian government has long supported separatist governments in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moscow had deployed its 'peacekeepers' in the region before the 2008 war. However, the situation remained volatile, and both Russian-backed separatist forces and ethnic Georgian militia undertook attacks. Since the 2008 conflict, Russia has reinforced its military presence in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and is largely viewed as a security guarantor vis-à-vis Georgia.

Exchanges of gunfire and border skirmishes continue to take place along the administrative boundary line (ABL) between the separatist regions and Georgia. These outbreaks pose a significant risk to travel along South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's de facto borders with Georgia. Although an open military conflict is unlikely to recur in the short term, the presence of Russian troops in these areas exacerbates regional instability and increases the possibility of localised skirmishes escalating into more serious security incidents.

### **North Caucasus**

Militant groups in the predominantly Muslim republics of the North Caucasus continue to fight for secession from Russia and the establishment of an Islamic state. Attacks are typically, though not exclusively, bombings and shootings targeting police and security convoys, patrol units and checkpoints, as well as economic infrastructure. Such attacks still pose they pose a significant threat to civilians. Follow-up security operations often further exacerbate disruption in urban areas.

Militant groups occasionally carry out bombings against civilian or 'soft targets', especially in the most dangerous region of Dagestan, where federal troops were redeployed in October 2012 amid growing concerns over a further deterioration of the security environment. The disparate and interconnected nature of these groups and the uncertainty of the security environment make responsibility and motives for the frequent armed attacks in the region difficult to verify.

### **Eastern Ukraine**

The relationship between Russia and Ukraine fell apart after Moscow annexed Crimea following a controversial referendum a month after the Euromaidan protests led to the removal of the then president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, in February 2014. Historically, the peninsula was a part of the Russian Empire, but it was transferred from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954. Therefore, the Kremlin argues that it has finally reunified Crimea with Russia. The peninsula is home for a large ethnic Russian population and its port of Sevastopol is a strategically important base for Russia's naval fleet. However, the United States and the European Union calls the annexation a grave violation of international law. While Crimea's disputed status is likely to remain a source of instability, Ukraine is unlikely to attempt to retake the peninsula with military force.

The Euromaidan revolution and Russia's annexation of Crimea have led to the crisis in eastern Ukraine. Russian-backed separatists from the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) are fighting Ukrainian government forces. Russia, France and Germany brokered an agreement between Ukraine and separatist leaders in Minsk, Belarus, in February 2015. According to the deal, a 19-mile buffer zone was to be established between the two sides and a ceasefire was to come into force. However, hostilities have continued and have been particularly intense in the Donetsk and Mariupol areas of Donetsk Oblast.

The United States and the EU have repeatedly blamed Russia for supplying the separatists with weapons and manpower. However, Moscow persistently denies its involvement in the conflict. The result is a constant exchange of inflammatory statements in respect to the conflict that further contribute to the mutual antagonism between Russia and the West.

## **Syria**

In March 2011, pro-democracy protests in Deraa, Syria, following the arrest and torture of a dozen teenagers who had sprayed revolutionary graffiti on the wall of a school led to widespread civil unrest. The heavy-handed response of the Syrian security forces led to further protests demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. In the civil war that then erupted, approximately 12 million Syrians have fled their homes. Nearly eight million are internally displaced within Syria, and more than four million have sought refuge in nearby countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

The chaos of the civil war has also allowed various violent Islamist groups to take hold in Syria. The most notorious of these groups is Islamic State, which spread into Syria from Iraq. This means that the anti-Assad forces can be broadly divided into two camps: the mainstream opposition, consisting of the Free Syrian Army and other rebel groups, including some moderate Islamist groups, and a radical Islamist insurgency, consisting of Islamic State, al-Nusra Front and other jihadist groups (often in conflict with each other). A coalition of Western and Middle Eastern partners, including the United States, several European countries, Turkey and the Gulf states, and have been targeting Islamic State while at the same time supporting the Syrian opposition and trying to avoid indirectly shoring up Assad's position. In contrast, Russia has long supported Assad through international political support and the supply of equipment and weapons.

Russia extended this support to direct military engagement with airstrikes that began unexpectedly on 30 September 2015. Although ostensibly targeting Islamic State, Russian actions at first seemed to be directed largely against the mainstream opposition. As such it was widely believed that Putin is bolstering his ally's position under the cover of the international conflict to contain and destroy Islamic State. In addition to propping up Assad's rule, Putin is seeking to secure the future of Russia's naval base at Tartus and newly built air base in Latakia. However, following the downing of a Russian airliner en route from Egypt to Russia and the coordinated attacks in Paris in November 2015, Russia began targeting Islamic State as the international coalition against the group grew.

The Russian military intervention in Syria has so far been limited to an air campaign, and Putin has repeatedly stated that he has no intention of launching a ground operation. US security officials have claimed that Russia has 4,000 military personnel in Syria, with multiple rocket-launcher crews and long-range artillery batteries deployed outside the bases the Russians are using. There are also unconfirmed suspicions that Russian troops are already taking a direct part in the fighting on the ground in Syria.

With the entrance of Russia into the Syrian civil war, the three-way conflict between the United States, Europe, the Sunni Gulf states and the mainstream opposition; Russia, Hezbollah and Shia-ruled Iran, Iraq and Syria; and Islamic State has become even more complicated. With various different militaries and militias operating within Syria and little coordination between the two coalitions, which have differing strategies and long-term goals, the situation in Syria could have wider geopolitical ramifications beyond ending the civil war and removing Assad.

## International relations

The civil unrest that broke out in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, in late 2013 was sparked by Yanukovich's refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement and instead pursue membership of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Commission (EEA). Western leaders criticised Moscow's determination to inhibit Kiev's shift towards Europe. Putin was widely accused of attempting to return to 'spheres of influence' in the global order and seeking Russian dominance in the region.

The relationship between Russia and the West spoiled further amid Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The United States and the European Union imposed multiple rounds of sanctions against Russian businesses and individuals in an attempt to tame Putin's geopolitical ambition. Russia was also excluded from the G8 (now the G7), a major platform for international economic negotiations. For its part, Russia introduced an embargo on food imports from the European Union that has negatively affected some European producers.

Despite growing antagonism between Russia and the West, Moscow, Berlin and Paris attempted to collaboratively resolve the Ukrainian crisis. Their leaders, together with the president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, and representative of the self-proclaimed DNR and LNR signed the Minsk II ceasefire agreement in February 2015, aimed at ending hostilities between Ukrainian government forces and the Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. Additionally, Russia played an important role in negotiating the Iran nuclear deal alongside the United States, the United Kingdom, France and China in July 2015. As such, Russia has managed to somewhat preserve its diplomatic standing in the international arena. It is possible that Putin is hoping that Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict ostensibly against Islamic State will further increase his standing and end Russia's isolation by the West.

However, the relationship between Russia and the United States and the Europe is at its lowest point since the Cold War. This has resulted in anti-Western demonstrations and sentiment within Russia. Thus far, Western nationals in Russia have primarily experienced the current tensions manifested in deportations for alleged visa violations and the revoking of residency permits without explanation. As the economic situation in Russia is deteriorating, it remains possible that there will be an increase in anti-EU and anti-US sentiment. This may find expression in vandalism or other symbolic acts against Western targets, such as foreign businesses and NGOs.

## Part 2

### Travel risk assessment

The following travel risk assessment quantifies the risk from various specific threats that have been identified. A **threat** is a function of capability and intent. **Risk** is a function of the likelihood (taking into account threat and vulnerability) and impact (taking into account mitigation measures) of the threat occurring. Impact is assessed in terms of the effects on the time, cost and quality of a project. Impact takes into account a range of physical, financial, psychological, reputational and operational factors as well as any mitigation measures already in place.

$$\text{Threat} = \text{Capability} \times \text{Intent}$$
$$\text{Risk} = \text{Likelihood} (\text{Threat} + \text{Vulnerability}) \times \text{Impact}$$

The risk ratings in this report range from Low to High. The ratings are based on the risk matrix below. This gives more weight to risks with a high impact. This means a low probability/high impact risk is assessed as much more severe than a high probability/low impact risk. This avoids any averaging out of serious risks.

Likelihood	Very high	M	H	H	H	H
	High	L	M	H	H	H
	Medium	L	M	H	H	H
	Low	L	L	M	H	H
	Very low	L	L	L	M	H
		Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
		Impact				

Any risk with a Moderate or High rating should be **mitigated** (lessen the severity of) in order to bring it down to an acceptable level as determined by the **risk-reward tradeoff** of any travel to or operations in Russia.

## UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office travel advice for Russia

Advises against all travel	Advises against all but essential travel
<p>Within 10 kilometres of the border with the Ukrainian Donetsk and Lugansk Oblasts.</p> <p>Crimea.</p> <p>Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan and the districts of Budyonnovsky, Levokumsky, Neftekumsky, Stepnovsky and Kursky in Stavropol Krai.</p>	<p>Within 10 kilometres of the border with the Ukrainian Kharkiv Oblast.</p> <p>North Ossetia, Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria (including the Elbrus area)</p>

### Street-level crime

Although most tourist and business visits to Russia are trouble-free, street-level petty crime presents a threat to NGO staff while in Russia, particularly in Moscow where the crime rate is high compared with other cities of a similar size. Petty criminals in the capital and St. Petersburg often target business travellers due to their relatively easy identification and their actual or perceived affluence.

Most crimes are opportunistic, such as pickpocketing; bag-snatching; burglaries; theft of mobile phones, laptops and vehicles (including car-jackings); ATM and credit card fraud; and muggings (occasionally involving the use of force or weapons). The risk of pickpocketing in busy areas, including the metro, restaurants, bars, open market areas (*rynoks*) and airports is particularly acute in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Thefts from vehicles is a common problem in both cities and can occur when vehicles are left unattended and also while occupied and stationary at traffic lights, though the latter is less common. Street scams are also a major threat.

Rail, bus, taxis and metro systems are generally safe; however, informal 'gypsy' cabs pose a risk of being targeted, as taxi drivers are known to be complicit in a number of scams. In addition, incidents of bogus police officers harassing and robbing tourists and business travellers continue to be reported. Genuine police officers are obliged to show appropriate identification. Credit card theft and fraud are a growing concern to business travellers throughout Russia. The prevalence of credit card skimming has also risen in recent years, though rates remain well below European averages.

Analysis suggests that the risks are certainly increased during the hours of darkness, but petty crime also occurs during the day and in well-populated areas. Unemployed or homeless individuals and those under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants are responsible for many crimes within the cities, though street children are also responsible for a significant amount of petty crime. Some instances of petty crime are instigated by groups of criminals, often comprising Romas, or gypsies, who surround and distract their victim in order to steal possessions. One commonly reported technique involves forcing a baby into the victim's arms and then taking items from their pockets or bags while they hold the child.



There have been a growing number of incidents of business travellers being victims of drink spiking in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and criminals have been known to spike a victim's drink with drugs prior to attacking or robbing them. Unconscious victims are often left outside, which can be life threatening in the winter. Instances of travellers being sexually assaulted have also often been linked to drink spiking.

Violent crimes are also frequent in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Racially-motivated violent crime is a significant concern in both cities, especially Moscow. Such attacks are mostly carried out by right-wing skinhead groups and are generally targeted at travellers of African or Asian descent and other non-Russians, including Kazakhs, Georgians and Jews. It is also worth noting that members of right-wing skinhead groups carry out attacks against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) community. Rape and sexual assault are concerns for both men and women, though on-street incidents are rare.

There is a growing use of under-regulated 'traumatic guns', which look like conventional semiautomatic pistols but fire rubber bullets. While these devices are designed to be non-lethal, serious injuries and deaths have resulted from the use of such weapons during street and hotel muggings.

Street-level crime risk assessment	
Risk	Rating
Petty crime	Low
Theft from hotel/vehicle	Moderate
Mugging	High
Rape and sexual assault	Moderate
Drink spiking	Moderate
Traumatic guns	Low
Street-level scams	Moderate
Physical assault	Moderate
Credit card fraud	Low
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## Organised crime

Putin has pledged to eradicate organised crime in Russia. Organised criminal groups are certainly less numerous and pose significantly less threat to Russian society than in 1990s. However, organised crime is still a significant problem in Russia, with only a small number of areas where mafia groups do not operate. Organised criminal groups are particularly powerful in Moscow and St. Petersburg as well as in Siberia and the south of Russia.

The shadow economy is estimated to contribute up to 25% of Russia's total GDP. The activities of organised criminal groups in contemporary Russia include human trafficking, money laundering, kidnap, prostitution, casinos management, smuggling and narcotics. Mafia groups are also becoming increasingly involved in legitimate businesses. According to Russian security officials, criminal groups control more than 2,000 legitimate industrial entities in Russia, most in the far east and the Volga region.

With their increasing participation in official business activities, organised criminal groups have gained influence in political circles. In fact, over a half of all criminal groups in Russia maintain strong ties with corrupt officials and bribe them to obtain licenses and loan credits at privileged rates or acquire state property at reduced costs.

Foreign organisations with operations in Russia have fallen victim to extortion and protection rackets in some cases. Although foreign diplomatic missions often have some influence with local police authorities, law enforcement bodies rarely provide foreign organisations with protection against organised criminal groups.

Organised crime risk assessment	
Risk	Rating
Human trafficking	Low
Money laundering	Low
Kidnap	Moderate
Prostitution	Low
Narcotics and contraband	Low
Extortion	Low
Protection rackets	Low
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Low</b>

## Attacks on minority groups

There has been a substantial increase in xenophobic or racially motivated attacks against non-Slavic nationals in some of Russia's major cities. Ultranationalist groups are a significant force in the country. People of African, Asian, Middle Eastern or Jewish backgrounds are targeted in crimes ranging from harassment to violent assault and even murder; however, the majority of attacks take place against immigrants from the Caucasus region and Central Asia as well as foreign students studying in Russia. Most attacks occur in Moscow and St. Petersburg; university towns also tend to be affected. There is the potential for extremist groups to target any visitor to Russia who has darker skin or is easily identifiable as a foreigner. Various incidents can spark escalations in nationalist violence and are difficult to predict. There is usually an increase in attacks in the spring, following Adolf Hitler's birthday on 20 April. The violence often has an underlay of religious intolerance.

In 2013, Russia passed legislation introducing prison terms of up to three years for offending religious feelings. This has contributed to and reflected a growing religious intolerance in Russia. There are strong links between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church, which has experienced a revival of sorts under Putin. However, other religious groups face discrimination and bureaucratic obstacles in a range of areas, including acquiring legal status and establishing places of worship. There are widespread reports of the harassment of Muslims, especially in the North Caucasus. Followers of non-Orthodox Christianity and non-traditional religions, such as Baptists, Roman Catholics and Hare Krishnas, have also been targeted. At least 18 Jehovah's Witness groups faced criminal proceedings under Russia's extremism law in 2014.

Right-wing skinhead groups also carry out attacks against members of the LGBT community. Crimes against members of the LGBT community in general are a concern. There is also a history of violent counter-actions linked to LGBT events in Russia. Widespread homophobic sentiment occasionally translates into verbal abuse and in more extreme cases attacks against members of the LGBT community. Personnel who belong to one of these groups are advised to undertake additional precautions, including avoiding public displays of affection, gay venues and LGBT events. They should also be cognisant of a law banning the promotion of 'non-traditional sexual relations' that entered into force in Russia in June 2013. The definition and scope of prohibited activity is vague, but foreign nationals convicted under this law could face arrest, fines and deportation. The operating environment for NGOs working on LGBT issues in Russia continues to remain challenging.

Violence against women is a significant concern, particularly in the North Caucasus, where women continue to face threats, such as marriage by abduction and so-called honour killings. Rates of domestic violence against women in Russia are exceptionally high. According to official figures, 14,000 women are killed annually in Russia as a result of domestic violence and 65% of all murders are related to domestic violence. Sexism is strongly entrenched in Russian society. Traditions, patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women persist. The situation is not helped by United Russia's repeated emphasis of the role of women as mothers and caregivers. Sexual violence against women is not treated seriously by the Russian criminal justice system, which classifies rape and violent sexual assault as crimes of public-private prosecution – equivalent to a copyright violation or invasion of personal privacy. Social pressures to ignore cases of rape are particularly high in the North Caucasus.

Attacks on minority groups risk assessment	
Risk	Rating
Racially-motivated attacks	Moderate
Attacks on LGBT personnel	Moderate
Religious hate crimes	Moderate
Violence against women	Moderate
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## Kidnapping

The threat of kidnapping in Russia varies significantly by region or city. While generally low in most areas of the country, the risk increases in some major cities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, though the average foreign national or expatriate is rarely the target. Kidnappings are usually associated with business, politics or organised crime activity. Targets are normally wealthy individuals or their family members. While a number of foreign executives have been kidnapped in Russia in the past, there is a far greater trend for kidnappers to target rich Russian business people (particularly so-called oligarchs) and their families, either for ransom or revenge. Most of the abductions are for ransom, but sometimes the demands are for real estate instead of money. Some gangs have forced owners to sign over their property and threatened to kill them or their families if they went to the police. Indeed, many kidnappings in Russia go unreported.

Organised crime groups, especially major crime syndicates, engage in extortion, kidnapping and hostage taking, though they rarely target foreigners or persons with no connection to the criminal underworld. Most often, this type of kidnapping involves criminals taking other organised crime members hostage during feuds between rival syndicates. Those organised crime groups that do target foreigners usually kidnap business personnel, normally after the business refused to pay 'protection' money. However, there are very few such incidents recorded each year.

There are professional gangs in Russia that specialise in the abduction and illegal detention of high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and demand a considerable ransom for the victim's safe release. These professional groups often employ teams of specialists to perform a variety of specific tasks, including intelligence operatives, experienced snatchers and negotiators to demand ransom from the victim's family or employer.

The start of the second Chechen war in the late 1990s saw the North Caucasus emerge as one of the world's kidnapping hotspots. Separatist rebels in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria often abduct local figures to further their political goals or young able-bodied men in an effort to indoctrinate them to their cause. Although separatist rebels commit most kidnappings in the region, criminal gangs are increasingly becoming involved in kidnap for ransom activities. Some local officers from the security services are also suspected of involvement in kidnapping. The vast majority of victims are Russian, though foreign nationals have also been deliberately targeted in the past. Aid workers and foreign journalists are frequently targeted, largely because few other foreigners venture into the region. Abductees are often badly treated and many hostages have been killed. Instances of 'bride kidnapping' also continue to be documented.

Human trafficking is known to occur in Russia. Victims are primarily young women from Russia, Eastern Europe or the former Soviet republics, who are sold into prostitution or forced labour within Russia or other countries. However, it is difficult to accurately assess the true extent of this activity.

### Types of kidnap threat in Russia

#### High-net-worth individual kidnapping

HNWI kidnappings usually involves the selection of an individual of considerable wealth or a relation/employee of such person. Following the kidnapping, the criminals will contact the victim's family and/or employers and issue their ransom demands.

#### Tiger kidnapping

In tiger kidnappings the kidnappers demand a third party commit another crime on their behalf before the victim is released.

#### Express kidnapping

During express kidnappings, victims are abducted for a relatively short period of time in order to extract as much money from them as possible as quickly as possible. The victim is usually forced to withdraw funds from a cash machine or to hand over their bank card and PIN.

#### Virtual kidnapping

Virtual kidnappings are a scam. The criminal waits until their target is uncontactable, for example they are out of the country, and then contacts the target's family or employers and claims that they are holding the target and demand a ransom for his or her release.

#### Political and terrorist kidnapping

In politically motivated kidnappings, the victim is selected for what they represent and believe or as a bargaining tool to further a political agenda, to demand the release of a prisoner, raise awareness of a cause, increase funds through ransom or to force a compromise from a government.

#### Vendetta kidnapping

Vendetta kidnappings are commonly associated with feuding criminal gangs and are committed in response to drug disputes, to recover debts, as revenge for a physical attack upon a gang member or simply to gain notoriety between organisations.

Kidnap risk assessment	
Risk	Rating
HNWI kidnapping	Moderate
Tiger kidnapping	Moderate
Express kidnapping	Moderate
Virtual kidnapping	Low
Political and terrorist kidnapping	Low
Vendetta kidnapping	Low
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## Health

The Russian health care system is very limited overall and standards of care vary significantly from one part of the country to another. Private clinics operate in major cities, and provide a much higher standard of care compared to state-run institutions; however, they do not necessarily accept cases for all types of medical treatment. Serious medical issues will require repatriation or evacuation to a country with more advanced medical facilities. Personnel are strongly advised against elective procedures within Russia.

It should be noted that doctors and hospitals often expect immediate cash payment for medical services. Pharmacies (*apteka*) are available in all major cities, though certain medicines are often in short supply. Not all medical personnel can speak English; therefore, some knowledge of Russian or a translator may prove useful when communicating with doctors.

Comprehensive medical insurance, which includes provision for medical repatriation or evacuation, is strongly recommended. Personnel are also advised to take an appropriate supply of any prescription medication, which should be accompanied by a written doctor's instruction explaining the need for the medication and justifying the quantities required. However, Russia has very strict rules on importing medication. Some prescription and over-the-counter drugs commonly used elsewhere are prohibited in Russia, and large quantities of any medicine being imported will be checked by the authorities.

All tap water in Russia should be regarded as a potential health risk, as more than half of Russia's water supply does not meet reasonable health standards. Local water supplies are contaminated with giardia, a protozoan that causes severe diarrhoea, and it is advised that the client should only consume bottled water. Street vendors and unregulated food establishments often have substandard hygiene requirements. Studies found that over 20% of poultry products in Russia were contaminated with Salmonella.

In many urban areas, especially near the Ukrainian and Belarusian border, food and water quality are poor due to chemical and radiological contamination. The Volga River is especially polluted, and environmentalists claim it is no longer suitable for water supply systems. Hazardous waste disposal, residential sewage and industrial and agricultural runoff have all contributed to Russia's environmental pollution problem.

According to Russian interior ministry statistics, nearly 42,000 people annually die in Russia due to surrogate alcohol poisoning. Alcohol in well-established hotels and restaurants is safe; however, visitors to local homes or public houses could be exposed to contaminated alcohol. The most common contaminating substance is methanol, which can cause blindness, headache, vertigo, nausea, vomiting, lethargy and confusion. Since many symptoms of methanol poisoning are similar to the effects of alcohol, victims often do not recognise they are affected until the poisoning is advanced.

Due to infection concerns and uncertainty regarding the safety of the Russian blood supply, blood transfusions are not recommended unless necessary to save life. Moscow's central blood bank claims to test for HIV-1, syphilis and Hepatitis B and C; however, independent inspectors have not been allowed to verify this claim. The blood supply may not be screened elsewhere in Russia.

Personnel should visit their GP at least four to six weeks prior to departure, which should allow the necessary time for most prescribed vaccinations to take effect. A visit to a medical professional is still recommended even if travel is to be undertaken in less than four weeks. Further medical advice should be sought, but it is advisable to have the following vaccinations before travel to Russia:

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Typhoid
- Rabies (if you might be exposed to wild animals or infected domestic animals)

It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for the following diseases:

- Influenza
- Chickenpox (or varicella)
- Polio
- MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella)
- Diphtheria
- Pertussis
- Tetanus

Health risk assessment	
<b>Risk</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Health risk	Moderate
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## Civil unrest

There has been a noticeable increase in protests and demonstrations in Russia since a coordinated series of large anti-government, anti-Putin demonstrations took place across the country in March 2010. The number of large-scale anti-government protests increased dramatically following disputed parliamentary elections in December 2011. These continued into 2012, and intensified during the run up to the presidential elections in March, prompting large-scale pro-government counter-demonstrations. These have become progressively less frequent since 2013; however, they continue to take place periodically in Moscow.

More recently, a series of pro- and anti-government gatherings have been prompted by developments in Ukraine. The focus has been on Russia's involvement in Crimea's unilateral declaration of independence in March 2014 and its alleged support for separatist militants in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Domestic support for intervention in Ukraine remains significant, and pro-intervention rallies have been well attended. Despite some anti-Putin sentiment, the president remains overwhelmingly popular, and major political unrest or other direct threats to his position are unlikely.

Small- to medium-sized gatherings occur regularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Major anti-government demonstrations are generally rare and are often related to domestic and regional political and economic concerns, including elections, foreign policy, corruption and economic recession. Protests are most frequently reported in Moscow, where they take place in several central squares (*ploshchad*) near the Kremlin. In St Petersburg, protests are often reported in the Field of Mars (Marsovo Pole) and Lenina and Konyushennaya squares.

Most major rallies that take place are in recognition of a public holiday. For example, the Victory Day 70th Anniversary on 9 May 2015 was marked by the nationwide 'Immortal Regiment' marches that were joined by 12 million people. In February 2015, tens of thousands of people gathered in central Moscow for an anti-Maidan rally to express their support for Putin and antipathy towards the 'colour revolutions' of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans.

Annual festivals for the armed services are often marred by violence as former and current servicemen congregate in public areas to drink and socialise throughout the day. Passers-by are often subject to harassment during these gatherings. Nationalist rallies that take place periodically in the capital and St. Petersburg have also turned violent (most notably in December 2010, when protests by football supporters and nationalist elements degenerated into rioting). Accordingly, nationalist rallies are closely monitored, and have occasionally been forcibly dispersed. Clashes are also known to occur between rival groups, such as communists and nationalists.

The non-systemic opposition in Russia continues to stage protests against the Putin's government; however, their actions remain limited and severely restricted by the authorities. The majority of such protests are peaceful and authorised, though still present a risk of strong police intervention.



Unauthorised demonstrations, not sanctioned in advance by the authorities, often turn violent due to strong police action. Individuals at such gatherings are routinely arrested and occasionally given short prison sentences for public disorder charges. The police often do not differentiate between participants and bystanders at these demonstrations. Personnel are advised to avoid all public gatherings as a precautionary measure. The authorities often refuse permission for events organised by groups defending LGBT rights. These gatherings generally proceed as planned despite such bans and lead to clashes between activists and far-right supporters.

Civil unrest risk assessment	
Risk	Rating
Civil unrest	Moderate
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## Militant activity and terrorism

Terrorist activity is a major concern in Russia, and further terrorist attacks are likely. There are regular armed clashes and small-scale terrorist operations in towns and cities in the North Caucasus, including Grozny, Khasavyurt, Magas, Makhachkala, Nalchik and Nazran. Violent attacks are orchestrated by separatist militants, and are targeted at law enforcement agencies, state authorities and government facilities. The situation in the region has been highly volatile since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as an Islamist insurgency has been seeking independence from Russia.

Although terrorist activity is mainly concentrated in the North Caucasus, extremist groups have also carried out attacks in major cities around Russia. For example, three suicide bombings were carried out in Volgograd in southwestern Russia in 2013. Several alleged plots have also been prevented. For example, the Islamic Party of Turkestan planned an attack in Moscow on 9 May 2014 during a Victory Day celebration.

Although there is no indication that foreign nationals have been directly targeted, attacks could be indiscriminate, including in places frequented by foreigners, such as tourist sites, markets and transport hubs. The threat from terrorism in Russia could rise quickly following any escalation of violence in the North Caucasus. Personnel should heed any changes to the travel advice issued by their country's foreign ministry.

Russian authorities have been known to tighten security in central areas of Moscow and may close tourist sites, such as Red Square, if they believe there is an imminent terrorist threat. However, major disruptions are very rare.

## Recent terrorist attacks in Russia

**2013:** In December, two separate suicide bombings occurred in Volgograd, killing 34 people. Two months earlier, a bus bombing in the same city killed seven people and injured 36 others.

**2011:** A suicide bomber from the North Caucasus region struck the international terminal at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport (DME), killing 36 people and injuring more than 150.

**2010:** Two female suicide bombers struck the Lubyanka and Park Kultury metro stations in Moscow, killing 40 people and injuring more than 100.

**2009:** A bomb derailed the high-speed Nevsky Express train traveling between Moscow and St. Petersburg, killing 30 passengers and injuring almost 100.

**2007:** An explosion linked to terrorists from the North Caucasus region derailed the Nevsky Express train traveling between Moscow and St. Petersburg. No serious injuries were sustained.

**2004:** The near-simultaneous suicide bombings of two Russian airliners after they had taken off from Moscow, killing a total of 89 passengers and crew.

**2003-04:** A string of suicide and car bombings in Moscow, with two suicide bombings targeting the Moscow metro and one car bombing occurring near the Kremlin.

**2002:** A hostage siege at the Nord-Ost Theatre in Moscow resulted in at least 170 people killed and more than 700 injured.

### Militant activity and terrorism risk assessment

Risk	Rating
Militant activity and terrorism	Moderate
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## Corruption

Corruption affects most levels of government, law enforcement and the military and is widespread throughout business.

Efforts to reduce government corruption in recent years have had little success. The main areas of corruption are government contracts and purchases, the issuance of permits and certificates, law enforcement agencies, land distribution and land relations, and construction. In the 1990s, business owners often had to pay organised criminal groups protection money; today, officials perform that 'protective' role.

Of particular concern to Western personnel is law enforcement corruption, specifically among the traffic police force. The Russian highway patrol is notorious for stopping vehicles that they believe contain foreign occupants in order to enforce false or exaggerated motoring violations. Anyone clearly not of Slavic ethnicity is at risk of harassment in this regard. Personnel should be aware that any legitimate fines for traffic violations are paid via a bank rather than in cash. Any attempt by the police to extract cash for an apparent violation should be rejected.

Police officers have also been known to target foreign nationals for small 'fees' to bypass low-level bureaucracy. A number of incidents have been reported in Moscow's Red Square (Krasnaya Ploshad), GUM department store and the Novy Arbat Avenue. Personnel should also note that Russian police officers might attempt to extract bribes by demanding to see identification documents and then identifying a real or fictitious problem with visas. There have also been isolated incidents of police officers robbing foreigners who have entered police vehicles. Police officers have also been known to urge victims not to file reports for cases that look problematic to handle. In general, officers face little sanction for wrongdoing.

Certain goods, particularly high-technology items, such as laptops or smart phones, can and have been confiscated on arrival in Russia on spurious grounds. This is more likely at regional airports than in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The customs committee has stated that there are no restrictions on bringing in laptops for personal use, and customs officers are unlikely to threaten to confiscate a laptop or a mobile when travelling to Moscow or St. Petersburg. Any officer who does so is potentially seeking to extract a bribe.

Transparency International ranked Russia #136 out of 175 countries in its 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), with a score of 27 out of 100. In 2013, Russia was in #127; #133 in 2012; #143 in 2011 and #154 in 2010. In relation to the corporate sector, Transparency International Russia has concluded that neither the Russian government nor private companies are interested in adopting a rule-based business approach. The lack of transparency around state-controlled businesses and their subsidiaries within the various government ministries is a significant issue, particularly with regards to the ministry of defence, which uses the fig leaf of national security to avoid public scrutiny.

Corruption risk assessment	
Risk	Rating
Exaggerated traffic fines	Low
Bribes	Low
Visa identification issues	High
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## Government surveillance

As in the Soviet era, government surveillance and espionage is still being conducted against foreign organisations and individuals that the government perceives to be a threat to state-owned industries or national security interests. There have also been cases of deliberate harassment and even arrests of Western business travellers on false charges of espionage that have taken months to resolve. The threat of state monitoring activities presents a very real risk to Western NGOs and foundations.

Personnel should be aware that there is a risk that the Russian authorities will be aware of their travel plans and schedule within Russia. The authorities may have already intercepted sensitive telephone or internet communications, particularly through existing surveillance of local employees of Western NGOs or local grantees. Personnel should be aware that their internet and email traffic may also be subject to interception. Russian law permits the monitoring, retention and analysis of all data that passes through Russian communications networks, including faxes, telephone calls, internet browsing and emails.

Personnel should also be aware that their hotel rooms in Russia might be monitored by hostile technical surveillance and eavesdropping equipment and that important documents and equipment could be compromised or stolen. In addition, it is possible that there will be a degree of covert surveillance imposed upon local employees or grantees. The safety of Western personnel could be compromised, as further physical surveillance could be carried out that could entail a degree of harassment or detainment.

The risk of personnel being subjected to surveillance, communication interception and harassment in Russia and in their home country is also elevated should the authorities discover that an inappropriate business or tourist visa has been applied for or if the authorities learn that their visa sponsor has no commercial connection to the the personnel or their employer. This will provide the authorities with a motive to investigate their activities. (NGOs and foundations should also be aware that insurance policies could be invalidated if it is found that a visa has been obtained illegitimately, which could present an issue during a claim on the policy, especially where medical or security evacuation of personnel is required.)

While the government undertakes its intelligence gathering operations through the Federal Security Services (FSB), many former intelligence officers are employed by the private sector. Although legal changes have banned private security companies from using surveillance and tapping equipment within Russia, the government may commission such companies to monitor the activities of foreign nationals during their time in Russia.

Government surveillance risk assessment	
Risk	Rating
Government surveillance	High
Government awareness of the trip	High
<b>Overall risk rating</b>	<b>High</b>

## Part 3

### Russian legislation

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The operating environment for human rights defenders and civil society activists in Russia has become even more constrained over 2014-15. Many activists have been subject to harassment and violence. In addition to those working on human rights issues, activists and journalists expressing alternative views on the conflict in Ukraine were at particular risk.

Furthermore, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has repeatedly expressed his fear that Western countries use NGOs to manipulate Russian public opinion in order to stir up popular discontent and advance the foreign policy interests of their home countries. In response, three pieces of legislation have been enacted that attempt to curtail foreign influence in Russia's NGO community. The **treason law** and the **foreign agent law** impact directly on local NGOs funded by Western foundations, and the **law on undesirable organisations** could impact directly on Western NGOs and funders.

#### Treason law

On 23 October 2012, Russia's parliament expedited the adoption of a series of amendments to the law on treason and espionage drafted by the Federal Security Service (FSB) that expanded the definition of treason to 'providing financial, technical, advisory or other assistance to a foreign state or international organisation ... directed at harming Russia's security'. Under the previous law, treason only applied when the assistance damaged Russia's *external* security. The amendments make it a crime to pass on information obtained from open sources to foreign and international organisations if the receiving organisation intends to use it to harm Russia's national security interests.

The broad wording of the law puts almost any Russian who has contact with foreigners at risk of being charged with treason. Russians representing international organisations are at particular risk of being charged. This has led many human rights campaigners to believe that the legislation is intended to scare Russians into cutting their links with Western NGOs. Russian officials have maintained that the law is necessary to help prevent foreign governments using organisations in Russia to gather state secrets. It has been used by Russian law enforcement and security services to justify close surveillance of NGOs and activists.

Under the revised law, Russians can now be jailed for up to four years if they have obtained information deemed a state secret, even if they do not pass it on to a foreign state; they can be jailed for up to eight years if they obtain state secrets using specialised surveillance equipment. The maximum punishment for high treason in Russia is 20 years in prison.

## Foreign agent law

Russia's 'foreign agent' law (Federal Law 272-FZ) was signed by Putin in July 2012 and took effect in November 2012. However, the law was not actively enforced until the president instructed senior FSB officers to do so during a speech in February 2013. The most controversial element of the law is the requirement that organisations engaging in political activity and receiving foreign funding must register as 'foreign agents', the Cold War-era term for spies.

The Russian state determines whether an organisation is engaging in political activity, which it loosely defines as any acts aimed at influencing the decision-making of public authorities, changing public policy or influencing public opinion with respect to government policy. It has a wide reach, affecting NGOs working on civil, political, social and economic rights, as well as environmental issues and discrimination, including against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Any foreign donation an organisation receives exceeding ₺200,000 (approximately £2,250) are monitored. In theory, an organisation must register as a foreign agent regardless of what kind of opinion (positive or negative) they have of government policy. According to the Russian justice ministry, an organisation can even be deemed a foreign agent simply for discussing the law on foreign agents itself.

Organisations that are designated as foreign agents in Russia must comply with a set of rules that includes:

- Producing financial reports about their political activities on a quarterly basis.
- Filing documents disclosing the composition of their management and its activities on a semi-annual basis.
- Undergoing a state audit on an annual basis. While this planned audit is scheduled once per year, foreign agents may be subjected to an unlimited number of unscheduled audits.
- Registering all of their political activities with the authorities before being allowed to carry them out.
- Labelling all of their publications and any other materials distributed in the media (including on the internet) as products of foreign agents.

If an organisation deemed to be a foreign agent fails to register as such, it will be banned from participating in public demonstrations, access to its bank accounts will be limited, and it may be subject to a fine of up to ₺300,000 (approximately £3,375) or its personnel may face up to two years in prison. Violations of the law are now under the jurisdiction of Russia's Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) and the Federal Security Service, which are responsible for combatting money laundering and terrorism respectively. The Russian authorities are allowed to intervene and suspend an NGO's activities for up to six months.

Within the first year of the law coming into force:

- At least 10 NGOs were taken to court by the Russian authorities for failing to register as an 'organisation performing the functions of a foreign agent'.
- At least five other NGOs across Russia were taken to court following 'inspections' for purported administrative violations, such as the failure to present requested documents.
- At least 10 Russian NGO leaders were ordered to comply with the foreign agents law.
- At least 37 NGOs were officially warned that they would be in violation of the law if they continued to receive foreign funding and engage in arbitrarily defined 'political activities'.

In June 2015, the Russian justice ministry presented the State Duma with a report on the activities of NGOs that 'perform functions of a foreign agent'. The report states that of the 55 NGOs included on the ministry's registry of foreign agents, only four registered voluntarily – the ministry named 33 of the organisations and the public prosecutor named another 18. The report highlights the difficulties the ministry faces in identifying NGOs that receive foreign funding indirectly through an intermediary, and asked for further legislation to allow them to obtain this information more easily.

The justice ministry report also identifies the following organisations as financers of the most active foreign agents:

1. National Endowment for Democracy (United States)
2. John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (United States)
3. Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (United States)
4. Oak Foundation (Switzerland)
5. The Nordic Council of Ministers (Denmark)
6. Den Norske Helsingforskomite (Norway)

On 10 August 2015, the Kremlin announced the formation of an expert group in response to a request from the Presidential Human Rights Council seeking clarification of the foreign agent law. Its main task will be to decide whether there is any need for legislative changes. Vyacheslav Volodin, currently First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of Russia, was appointed to head the group, which includes over 50 members. The members of the group that have been named include the chair of the upper house committee for constitutional law, Senator Andrei Klishas; the chair of the Duma committee on civil and criminal legislation, Pavel Krashennikov; regional leaders and representatives, such as the head of the Republic of Dagestan, Ramzan Abdulatipov; the newly appointed head of the Republic of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov; the mayor of Novosibirsk, Anatoliy Lokot; and head of Petrozavodsk city district, Galina Shirina. The group also includes three members of the Presidential Council on Human Rights: Elena Topoleva, Elizaveta Glinka and Mikhail Fedotov. The group met in mid-October 2015 with the aim of clarifying the definitions of the terms 'foreign agent' and 'political activities'; however, the group was unable to reach agreement, though it is expected to do so by the end of the year.

## Law on undesirable organisations

The law on 'undesirable organisations' (Federal Law 129-FZ) was signed in May 2015 as a follow-up to the 2012 law on foreign agents. It gives the Kremlin the power to declare certain foreign and international organisations 'undesirable' and shut down their operations in the Russian Federation. On 8 July 2015, the upper house of Russia's Federal Assembly released the following list of 12 foreign NGOs whose work is considered to pose a threat to Russia's national security and should therefore be banned from operating in the country. Notably, all of the organisations on this list have carried out advocacy work in Ukraine following the ousting of the pro-Kremlin Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, in February 2014:

1. Open Society Foundation (United States)
2. National Endowment for Democracy (United States)
3. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (United States)
4. International Republican Institute (United States)
5. MacArthur Foundation (United States)
6. Freedom House (United States)
7. Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (United States)
8. Education for Democracy Foundation (Poland)
9. East European Democratic Center (Poland)
10. Ukrainian World Congress (Canada)
11. Ukrainian World Coordinating Council (Ukraine)
12. Crimean Field Mission on Human Rights (Ukraine)

This 'stop list' does not carry the power of law, as Russia's prosecutor general, foreign minister and justice minister must still approve the list of organisations before they will be prohibited from working within the Russian Federation. As of the end of October 2015, the only organisation that has officially been outlawed in Russia is the National Endowment for Democracy.

A person who manages the activities of an 'undesirable organisation' could face up to six years in prison. Managers may also be prohibited from taking managerial or executive roles for 10 years thereafter. Individuals found participating in the activities of an undesirable organisation could be fined ₺15,000 (approximately £190); repeat offenders could face up to six years in prison. The wording of the law is vague, using the word 'participating', which could allow for broad interpretation and application. As yet, there are no identified cases of individuals being fined or imprisoned for managing or being involved with an undesirable organisation since the new law came into force.

The Russian operations of the named 'undesirable organisations' and the foundations identified as funding the most active 'foreign agents' are clearly at risk, as are the operations of the local NGOs themselves.







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