

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Develop an asylum system that meets international standards.
- Pursue identification of long-term solutions for asylum-seekers and refugees and assist asylum-seekers in achieving greater economic independence.
- Facilitate the local integration of various categories of persons covered by the CIS Conference Programme of Action (e.g. stateless persons).
- Help the government to protect and assist IDPs in the Northern Caucasus.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Development of the asylum system

In April 2001, the Russian Federation Government passed the long-awaited resolution on temporary asylum, provided for under the 1997 Law on Refugees. The resolution is meant to provide subsidiary protection on humanitarian grounds to persons not falling under the definition of a refugee. It is expected that several thousand Afghan asylum-seekers will benefit from the temporary asylum regime. Refugee identity documents and asylum-seeker certificates, which became available at the end of 2000, have been regularly issued during the reporting period. However, problems are encountered with the issuance of residence registration to documented asylum-seekers.

During the first quarter of the year (mid-year official statistics are not available yet), some 144 persons (74 cases) in Moscow city and 56 persons (15 cases) in Moscow region were officially recognised as refugees. The rejection rate is estimated to be over 90%. This is partly explained by formal admissibility limitations (e.g. time limits for the submission of an application, and use of the safe third-country concept), and by the

strict interpretation of the definition of a refugee. The pace of processing applications has significantly increased in the first part of the year. The number of applications processed during the first semester is almost double the total figure for last year (213 cases/389 persons processed by end of June 2001 against 153 cases/293 persons for the whole of the year 2000). However, the waiting period before pre-registration and entry into refugee status determination (RSD) remains very long (2-3 years).

In the first half of 2001, the UNHCR Moscow Refugee Reception Centre (RRC) registered a total of 226 new cases and provided visits/consultations to 8,525 asylum-seekers. In St Petersburg 503 persons (86 cases) received legal counselling at the Refugee Reception Centre managed by the Red Cross. The Russian Lawyers Committee in Defence of Human Rights provided legal consultations to 124 asylum-seekers and refugees.

In total, the RRC has now recorded 2,537 active cases (6,530 people). The decrease from the end of last year (9,180 persons) is partly due to the Office's revised definition of an active case, which now means that contact with UNHCR has been made within the last year rather than 2 years. Approximately 85% of this caseload are Afghans. The remaining 15% are of various African nationalities, Iraqis and Iranians, and several others. Unofficial sources estimate the number of Afghans in Moscow to be close to 20,000 persons.

UNHCR works with four NGOs (all national) and one GO in Moscow city and Moscow region (where our activities benefit at least 2,500 asylum-seekers), and with three NGOs in St Petersburg (benefiting over 1000 asylum-seekers).

UNHCR organised an annual workshop held for newspaper journalists coming from 30

regions of the Russian Federation. The film festival on human rights held in St Petersburg and Perm and a weekly radio programme on "Radio of Russia" aimed to better the awareness of refugee issues of the public at large. The events organised on the occasion of the first World Refugee Day as well as various publications locally

produced helped to raise further awareness of refugees' problems in Russia. In February, on the initiative of several local Russian information agencies, a round table on the situation of non-CIS asylum seekers was held for local and international media located in Moscow.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATOR	PROGRESS
Support the Government to adopt asylum system that meets international standards	In April 2001, the Government passed resolution on temporary asylum.

Workable Durable Solutions

Voluntary repatriation: During the reporting period, UNHCR RO Moscow assisted the voluntary repatriation of some 26 non-CIS refugees to their country of origin, including seven from DRC, five Angolans, four from Sierra Leone, three Cameroonians, two Ethiopians, two Somalis, one Sudanese, one Burundian and one Congolese. Since the beginning of the year, only one voluntary-repatriation convoy for Georgian refugees was organised, repatriating three families (7 persons).

Resettlement: The resettlement project in Russia was initiated at the end of 1999 to provide this option for primarily non-CIS refugees who face acute physical/protection needs and/or who lack any prospect for local integration. African asylum-seekers are deemed more vulnerable than others. During the reporting period, 238 cases (451 persons) were interviewed – including refugee eligibility interviews – and 90 cases (187 persons) were submitted for resettlement. During the same period, a total of 31 cases (72 persons) were accepted for resettlement by third countries. UNHCR resettled 11 refugees from North Korea on emergency grounds.

Local Integration: Self-reliance for the asylum-seekers and recognised refugees remains a major challenge. The difficulty of obtaining residence registration blocks access to social services and prevents refugees from enjoying the rights to which they are entitled. Nonetheless, UNHCR continues to support asylum-seekers in increasing their self-reliance to the extent possible in this vacuum of legal protection,

and to support activities which should enhance the potential for integration in the Russian Federation, should they finally obtain refugee status. During this period, 30 people were put in touch with prospective employers. Some asylum-seekers then lost their jobs because of police harassment and consequent inability to reach their place of work. Training opportunities have been more oriented towards those spheres of employment where there seem to be vacancies. Specific activities in training and marketing handicrafts made by Afghan women are being pursued. A more ambitious job creation project with a publishing company was explored and an agreement signed, but so many problems appeared unresolved that the Office decided not to proceed. In St Petersburg, 56 women took sewing and hairdressing classes. Despite the lack of real progress in obtaining documents and the lack of registration, the Office has decided to re-define the programme of individual assistance by properly implementing strictly time-limited cash assistance for new arrivals, and by phasing out all current beneficiaries of the programme by the end of December 2001. During this period it is hoped that progress will be made in the proper issuing of asylum-seeker documents and facilitated residence registration that will allow for legal employment. The majority of the African asylum-seekers in the programme (367) should have been resettled or be under consideration for resettlement, along with some other extremely vulnerable cases. In January 2002, the individual assistance programme will be reoriented to forms of

assistance that clearly strengthen and are linked to potential integration capacities, e.g. for vocational skills training and children in schools. Progress was achieved in the area of education. The first group of 20 asylum-seeker and refugee children attended preparatory classes at a school in southern Moscow, in the framework of a pilot project between UNHCR, the Moscow Committee of Education and the school. They will be officially enrolled into regular classes in September, when a second group of 25 will start preparatory classes. At the community centres, 15 students did well enough to pass external school exams that would qualify them for further education in Russia. A total of 540 children attended UNHCR-supported classes in the centres. In Moscow Region, the situation is easier and children can access school officially without registration. In St Petersburg, individual coaching was given to 9 children who have missed several years of education. Thirty persons took Russian language and 36 computer classes. Thirty-four needy asylum-seeker students were assisted under the DAFI project during the second semester Jan-June 2001, receiving stipends and/or tuition fees. Fourteen students should graduate in August and the other 20 will continue their studies in the next academic year. Unfortunately, due to the funding cuts, no new asylum-seeker and refugee students will be

supported for the academic year 2001/2002. UNHCR supported sports competitions and recreational activities for children. Refugee Day was organised in which refugee, IDP, IRP, and local children participated. Medical assistance was provided for 5872 patients and 147 were referred for hospital treatment. A total of 18 cases were considered for resettlement on medical grounds. In St Petersburg, 968 persons had consultations at the Red Cross Society. In 2000, UNHCR started an integration programme for those Georgian refugees unable or unwilling to return to their homeland. The first stage included construction of 25 houses and distribution of 15 shelter kits for the most vulnerable families identified jointly by UNHCR and the Ministry for Federal Affairs, National and Migration Policy. Some 30 more houses in two settlements in North Ossetia (Voskhod-2 and Komsomolskoye) have been constructed in 2001 by UNHCR jointly with the Government. By the end of the project, the selected families will have received permanent residence and enjoy the same rights and services as the local population. In addition to shelter, UNHCR has also provided legal assistance in pursuit of local integration, and the collective residences have been visited proactively to ascertain needs.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Outreach capacity of social and community services programme for urban asylum-seekers and refugees increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afghan Outreach Team working well. Regular meetings between leaders and communities of other nationalities already take place • Community centres operating in all regions of Moscow (two new ones established); educational activities and women's clubs functioning well and psychological support activities now fully operational in all centres.
Georgian refugees are integrated in North Ossetia	30 most vulnerable refugee families obtained permanent residence registration in North Ossetia and were provided with housing

Reduction of Statelessness

The main focus in the Russian Federation has been to promote the accession to the statelessness conventions while at the same time lobbying with deputies of Duma and the decision-makers to revise and refine the

current citizenship law to be in line with international standards. UNHCR has actively participated in re-drafting the citizenship law, which has been taken up in the Duma several times. While those Meskhetians who reside in regions other

than Krasnodar have been able to legalise their status in the Russian Federation, the local authorities in the Krasnodar region did not issue permanent registration to Meskhetians who arrived in 1989-91. As a result, of 13,581 Meskhetians in the region, to date only 2,147 have been able to apply for citizenship and/or to obtain permanent residence. Meskhetians continue to face many obstacles to local integration, not least of which is the very hostile attitude of the

local Cossack community. UNHCR's major focus in the region has been on legal assistance. A local NGO maintains two legal counselling points in Krasnodar and Krymsk. Although the local administrations remain highly reluctant to legalise the status of Meskhetians, NGOs' lobbying efforts promoted the adoption of a resolution by the regional Ministry of Interior that extends temporary registration of Meskhetians until 1 March 2002.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Legal rights of Meskhetians are ensured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 452 legal consultations including 135 applications to court and 28 cases of participation in court hearings • Temporary residence registration of Meskhetians extended to March 2002

Population Displacement in the Northern Caucasus

As the conflict in Chechnya escalated towards the end of 1999, IDPs began arriving in Ingushetia and other parts of the North Caucasus region in increasing numbers. By June 2001, according to the Ministry of Nationality, an estimated 136,000 IDPs were temporarily residing in Ingushetia; 31,000 in camps, 24,700 in spontaneous settlements or premises rented by the Ministry of Nationality, and 80,200 in host families. Another 5,800 are currently settled in Stavropol, 4,500 in Dagestan and 2,400 in North Ossetia.

Since April 2001, the local branch of the Ministry of Nationality in Ingushetia has refused to register new arrivals (estimated at 12,700). This caused the unregistered IDPs to be deprived of humanitarian aid and/or shelter provided by the Government. Nevertheless, newcomers continue to be registered by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and are included in the aid provided by international organisations. According to the DRC database, on which UNHCR assistance is based, the number of IDPs from Chechnya as of 30 June 2001 is 148,700 persons in Ingushetia and 132,323 in Chechnya. In Chechnya, according to the Ministry of Nationality, an estimated 225,700 IDPs are without permanent shelter,

out of whom 12,700 are currently residing in camps located in the northern part of the Republic. During the first six months of the year, UNHCR procured relief items and construction materials, dispatched through 55 convoys to Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. UNHCR's contribution in the sectors of shelter, water and sanitation has covered the basic needs of the IDPs, ensuring minimum living conditions for those who choose to stay in Ingushetia. To ensure closer monitoring and legal, psychological, social and medical assistance, ten counselling centres in the North Caucasus were further supported, including with protection training for lawyers at the centres. Women's special needs are being addressed in the areas of health, family planning, vocational training, childcare training and home-care for the sick. IDPs with physical disabilities are assisted with provision of wheel chairs, crutches and canes. Mine awareness training for young adults and children, carried out by UNHCR in close co-operation with UNICEF, has reached some 15,000 beneficiaries in Ingushetia and Chechnya.

UNHCR intervened in cases of eviction of IDPs, mainly from spontaneous settlements, and coordinated with local authorities in the search for alternative accommodation. UNHCR is working closely with authorities

to safeguard the principle of voluntary return. So far UNHCR has not registered any formal attempt to force IDPs to return to Chechnya. During the reporting period about 1,760 IDPs returned voluntarily to Chechnya, mostly from host families and mainly bound for Urus-Martan, Achkhoy-Martan and Shali regions. However, many of these people remain reluctant to return permanently to Chechnya due to reports of continued hostilities. UNHCR is supporting the Russian Government to re-establish the judiciary in Chechnya and to facilitate relations between law enforcement officers and IDPs in Ingushetia and Chechnya. UNHCR provided additional material support to the Office of the Special Representative of the President for Human Rights in Chechnya, lawyers associations and other NGOs to increase awareness and respect for IDPs' rights. Workshops were conducted for officials and NGOs on programme management and on the role of NGOs in peace building.

Field trips of local and international media to the North Caucasus, and regular coverage

in the local media of UNHCR's activities in the region helped increase public attention to the protection needs of IDPs and enhance the visibility of UNHCR's activities in the North Caucasus.

Although no formal framework for joint activities is in place, UNHCR has been able to support the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya with targeted material assistance (e.g. tents, plastic sheeting, blankets, mattresses, and timber) to camps in the Nadterechny district (North West of Grozny). Possible joint ODIHR/UNHCR training activities for judges/prosecutors, and lawyers have been discussed with ODIHR.

Security remains a major constraint in implementing UNHCR's programmes, limiting the Office's ability to assess the situation and to deliver/monitor assistance. Security incidents in Chechnya, including problems at checkpoints for NGOs, are continuously reported. Kidnapping continues to be the main threat against aid workers.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
IDPs in need are provided with adequate shelter in Ingushetia.	About 7,330 IDPs living in railway wagons were moved to tent camps in Ingushetia. The individual capacity of camps A and B of 4,000 residents was increased up to 5,070 inhabitants in camp A and 5,420 in camp B.
Counselling centres operational in Ingushetia, Chechnya and Daghestan.	Counselling centres provided legal, medical and social counselling to 2,238 cases in Ingushetia, 300 cases in Chechnya and 186 families in Daghestan. In Chechnya, UNHCR supported an NGO partner to open two offices in Grozny and Urus-Martan.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER

Asylum-seekers and refugees

The overall objectives of the programme remain unchanged, with particular focus on:

- Phase-out of current cash assistance programme and develop alternative assistance packages that reduce long-term expectations, encourage initiatives to increase self-reliance and promote eventual local integration;

- Improve the linkage between the assistance programme and resettlement for refugees who will not be able to integrate, making vulnerable African asylum-seekers a priority;
- Advocate for and support the Government in shortening pre-registration procedures in Moscow, ensuring speedy implementation of the temporary asylum legislation, and facilitating the residence registration of documented asylum-seekers.

IDPs

- Pending conditions conducive to safe and sustainable return, and in order to avoid protracted assistance programmes, temporary local integration of IDPs in Ingushetia or elsewhere in the Russian Federation will be the preferred solution.
- Provision of limited basic humanitarian assistance in cross-border operations or through UNHCR's partners in Chechnya to prevent further displacement and assist the most vulnerable. Ideally, UNHCR hopes that it can phase-down its assistance programme within 18 months (end 2002), concentrating on legal issues and core sectors such as shelter, and water/sanitation, which are closely linked to the physical protection of IDPs in Ingushetia.
- Strengthen the existing legal monitoring network in Ingushetia and further develop the one in Chechnya;
- Identify possible new sites together with the government or extend existing settlements to provide additional capacity in view of increasing evictions of IDPs from spontaneous settlements in Ingushetia;
- Develop a joint programme together with UNDP for self-sufficiency and local integration in Ingushetia of approx. 30,000 IDPs of Ingush ethnicity;
- Update UNHCR contingency plan and maintain emergency preparedness to adequately protect and assist any new arrivals, and provide returnee packages when needed.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available¹	Total Funds Obligated
APB	21,153,778	17,011,820	7,418,968	6,971,100

¹Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.