

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Support the development of an asylum system that meets international standards.
- Identify appropriate long-term (durable) solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers, and facilitate, in particular, the process of local integration.
- Promote accession to the Statelessness Conventions and acquisition of citizenship by the stateless, as well as assist in their further integration.
- Help meet the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Northern Caucasus.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED, AND CONSTRAINTS

Asylum in the Context of Mixed Population Flows

A lengthy institutional restructuring process has hampered progress in the building of an asylum system in the Russian Federation. Allocation of responsibilities in the new Federal Migration Service, which is part of the Ministry of the Interior, was finalised only in May.

UNHCR's main concern remains the implementation by the Russian Federation of its commitments as a State Party to the 1951 Convention. Access to the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure is highly problematic and the interpretation of the definition of a refugee is too limited. Consequently, the rejection rate is very high. However, at the appeal stage of the RSD procedure, courts played a positive role in strengthening the institution of asylum. For Moscow City and Region alone, 51 positive decisions to grant refugee status were taken during the first semester as opposed to 18 cases in the later half of 2001. The situation at Moscow's international airport continues to raise extreme concern. Asylum-seekers

have been denied access to the asylum procedure and the only viable situation for UNHCR was to continue to resettle stranded refugees in order to prevent refoulement.

The protection situation in Moscow City has deteriorated. The Moscow City authorities appeared more reluctant to implement the refugee law, and further administrative obstacles were put in place, aimed at barring access to the procedure. The same applies to the implementation of the decree on temporary asylum. During the first quarter of the year, only one case in Moscow City and two cases in Moscow Region were recognised as convention refugees. The number of pending applications remains high and the waiting period before pre-registration and entry into the RSD procedure is 2-3 years. Undocumented asylum-seekers are extremely vulnerable in view of the increase in xenophobia and racially-motivated attacks. An Afghan asylum-seeker was killed in April and several others were hospitalised. In addition, asylum-seekers do not enjoy socio-economic rights.

The RSD screening process conducted by UNHCR at its Refugee Reception Centre (RRC) in Moscow continued in response to the domestic protection situation. Some 5,638 persons were registered with the RRC during the reporting period. A total of 524 new cases (824 persons) were registered by the RRC and visits/consultations had been provided for more than 7,500 asylum-seekers by the end of June. The RRC streamlined its procedures and reoriented the policy for registration so that all those approaching the RRC with the intention of seeking asylum could receive legal assistance to present their refugee claims with the Russian authorities. Those found in need of international protection by UNHCR will be issued with beneficiary cards and will have access to material assistance.

UNHCR continued to promote the building

of an asylum system through training events for government officials and NGOs. It also engaged in public information and public awareness activities, through training of future migration officials, support to human rights institutions such as the Moscow School of Human Rights, and support for the network of lawyers providing legal counselling. (43 centres in 21 regions, of which 20 centres are supported by UNHCR).

Self-reliance for asylum-seekers in Moscow City and Moscow Region, where the majority reside, remains highly problematic owing to the lack of documentation at all stages of the proceedings. A small-scale job placement scheme enabled 46 persons to find short-term work. Most of them, however, lost their jobs after some time, mainly due to lack of documentation and police intervention.

UNHCR provides basic medical care through an implementing partner. 5,000 patients benefited, 127 of whom were provided with treatment in hospitals in the first half of 2002.

The Office piloted a new, revamped programme of individual assistance, where cash assistance will be limited to the vulnerable and/or those for whom a resettlement solution has been identified. Other forms of material assistance (winter clothes, school kits, food packages) were reduced, but were made available to all those registered with UNHCR. Delays in resettlement procedures for the United States have triggered a large increase in the number of cases receiving cash grants before acceptance by resettlement countries and departure, which has been a drain on the budget.

Progress was achieved in the area of education. Co-operation with the Moscow Committee of Education was increased and children from 9-12 were included in the preparatory classes held at Tulskeya School and the appropriate methodology was developed. As a result, 15 children will be ready for integration into regular classes in September, when a further 50 children between 6 and 12 will start preparatory classes. A decree removed the requirement of

residence registration for asylum-seekers for official access to schools. UNHCR is now re-orienting its education policy accordingly to encourage even more children to frequent local schools. Expanded preparatory classes are planned by the Committee on Education, involving more schools, and UNHCR has committed itself to assist this process.

UNHCR commissioned a consultancy to look at ways of improving mechanisms and methods of support to victims of domestic violence among the urban caseloads. A series of sensitisation and training sessions were conducted for refugee women, implementing partners and UNHCR staff from Moscow and St Petersburg.

In St Petersburg, more than 300 families of asylum-seekers, refugees and IDPs received legal counselling at the Refugee Reception Centre managed by an implementing partner. Over 1,000 persons had consultations/referrals and a further 80 persons of concern to UNHCR received psychological support. Individual coaching was given to 11 children who have missed several years of education, 18 Afghan children participated in pre-school preparation, and 35 adolescents attended computer classes. The Afghan Women's Club and the Afghan Cultural Centre (where children can learn their native languages and culture) continued to function. The implementing partner in St. Petersburg provided childcare facilities for women who attended various courses.

Twenty-five asylum-seeker students were assisted under the DAFI education project between January and June, receiving either stipends and/or tuition fees. Fifteen students graduated in June.

In Moscow, UNHCR assisted the voluntary repatriation of 14 non-CIS refugees to their country of origin. The resettlement project in Russia was initiated at the end of 1999, to benefit primarily non-CIS refugees facing acute physical protection needs and/or lacking any prospect for local integration. African asylum-seekers are considered the most

vulnerable. Since January 2002, UNHCR submitted 161 cases/284 persons to resettlement countries. Of these, 35 cases/79 persons were approved. The United States rejected 27 cases/35 persons. Only 27 cases/66 persons

departed for resettlement countries. 148 cases/254 persons are still pending. Ten urgent cases at risk of refoulement or facing high security threats were resettled.

Progress as measured against indicators

Impact/Performance Indicators	Actual Progress
War refugees and other humanitarian cases benefit from temporary asylum.	Increasing numbers are being granted temporary asylum (429 cases/622 persons in the first quarter) although problems remain with documentation; the certificates are available but the restructuring of the Federal Migration Service hampered their issuance.
Numbers of persons undertaking skills-training leading to real employment possibilities.	More interest was shown in training possibilities and a wider range of courses was attended (reflecting niches in the market in Moscow) but no 'graduates' of such courses were able yet to secure employment, due to lack of status and papers.
Asylum-seeker children are properly prepared for enrolment in local schools at appropriate grades.	Approximately 90 of 318 children enrolled at Community Centres will be able enter local schools in Sept 2002; 15 children will be enrolled following preparatory classes at Tuskaya Sch.
NGOs and governmental institutions concerned properly trained in RSD, statelessness issues and international protection instruments.	16 training events were organised or sponsored by UNHCR during the reporting period. They targeted 152 officials, lawyers, judiciary and NGO staff.

Registration and Permanent Reduction of Statelessness

UNHCR provided comments on the implementation of the Law on Citizenship, which comes into force on 1 July. It expressed concern over the difficulty faced by asylum-seekers in gaining access to the procedure and the required documents. Meskhetians residing in regions other than Krasnodar were able to legalise their status in the Russian Federation. However, the local authorities in the Krasnodar region did not issue permanent registration to Meskhetians who arrived between 1989-91. As a result, only 4,000 of the 13,581 Meskhetians in the region have obtained permanent residence and citizenship. Meskhetians continue to face many obstacles in their local integration. A new law passed in Krasnodar Krai has exacerbated the situation as it contains provisions on non-extension of sojourn registration and tougher sanctions (including expulsion) for illegal stay.

UNHCR contracted two legal agencies to

provide legal counselling to Armenian refugees from Baku (Azerbaijan), mainly in Moscow, on residence registration and issues related to citizenship. While there is some success through the judicial process, local authorities remain reluctant to legalise the status Armenians from Baku and to enforce court decisions. UNHCR also assisted the United States in determining criteria for selection of Armenians from Baku for a planned resettlement project for some of the caseload.

Response to Population Displacement in the Northern Caucasus

The largest concentration of refugees outside the urban centres of Moscow and St Petersburg is in North Ossetia (14,013 Georgian refugees at the end of 2001). During the reporting period, nearly 2,000 lost their refugee status through expiry of its validity, but most obtained citizenship and 'forced migrant' status. However, the situation of 7,000 persons still living in

temporary accommodation centres after 10 years, remained of great concern. UNHCR's shelter project to build 114 houses for the most vulnerable cases was delayed due to streamlining of the budget, and because the house design (to permit refugee participation in the building process) has not yet received the approval of the local authorities. There was no assisted voluntary repatriation of refugees to Georgia during this period, but an agreement will be signed to enable this in the second half of the year. Around 100 refugees are expected to apply for such assistance.

IDP statistics are being refined to reflect accurately the IDP population in Ingushetia. At the end of May, the implementing partner had registered 131,000 IDPs in Ingushetia and 139,000 IDPs in Chechnya. UNHCR estimates that there are at least 40,000 IDPs from the most recent conflict residing in other regions of the Russian Federation. Several tens of thousands more have fled Russia to seek asylum in other countries.

Starting from mid-May, the local authorities initiated a return process of IDPs from Ingushetia to Chechnya. UNHCR assisted individuals who wished to return of their own accord. UNHCR, through its partners is monitoring the situation of the returnees and assessing their needs in Chechnya. UNHCR estimated that, in the first half of the year, 3,300 IDPs returned to Chechnya and 2,950 arrived in Ingushetia. UNHCR, other UN agencies and the international community are concerned over statements made by authorities, and the drawing up of an Action Plan anticipating the return of IDPs to Chechnya by the end of the summer, while conditions are not conducive to large-scale return. Although the same authorities appear firm that return should be voluntary, it appears that pressures have been exerted on the IDP population in Ingushetia. These pressures include increased checks on IDPs in Ingushetia, and since last year, the non-registration of IDPs newly arriving in Ingushetia by the Federal Migration Service.

UNHCR, jointly with OSCE/OHIDR, continued to assist the Russian Federation to

establish a functioning judiciary structure in Chechnya.

The main protection activities of UNHCR are in Ingushetia. UNHCR and its partners re-accommodated 150 individual cases and is in the process of providing alternative shelter to an additional 44 families (228 persons). UNHCR also relocated three spontaneous settlements with 3,000 IDPs, when land-owners refused to allow IDPs to continue to occupy their sites. A project to support the integration of IDPs remaining in Ingushetia was elaborated by UNHCR in co-operation with an implementing partner. This project will target one settlement in particular (Berd-Yurt), designated by the Government, where the infrastructure is being prepared.

UNHCR continued its activities in maintaining shelter conditions for IDPs in Ingushetia. During the first half of the year, 1,036 tents in tented camps and spontaneous settlements were replaced, and 390 families located in 33 spontaneous settlements and host families were assisted with shelter materials. UNHCR's implementing partner continued the regular maintenance of a further 60 spontaneous settlements in Ingushetia. UNHCR completed the cost estimate of a "box-tent", which is more durable and cost-effective than a tent. In Chechnya, UNHCR's partner distributed shelter materials (roofing sheets, timber, plastic sheeting, ridge-capping and roofing nails) for some 900 vulnerable local families and returnees. The partner also conducted an assessment of refugee households and identified 1,071 households for continuation of this programme in Chechnya.

To closely monitor the situation of displaced populations in the North Caucasus, UNHCR continued to provide support to the network of the Counselling Centres working in Daghestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Stavropolski Krai and Karachaevo-Cherkessia. Emphasis was put on providing legal assistance to IDPs, and medical services and psycho-social counselling were also made available.

Progress as measured against indicators

Impact/Performance Indicators	Actual Progress
Minimum 15 litres of potable water per person per day provided in Ingushetia.	5073 m3 of potable water per monthly was trucked to 72 spontaneous settlements, 27 water points in host families and 2 tented camps, which accommodate some 35,000 IDPs.
Beneficiary data available for protection and assistance purposes.	An implementing partner (supported by UNHCR) maintained database on IDP population. In Ingushetia, updated information was available on a monthly basis As of 31 May, 131,906 IDPs were registered in Ingushetia and 139,953 IDPs in Chechnya. Some 3,200 IDPs were provided with alternative shelter.
Number of successfully resolved court cases on IDP/returnee problems.	1,083 cases on behalf of IDPs and 308 cases on behalf of returnees are under court consideration (criminal, civil and administrative) in Chechnya. These cases were prepared/submitted by Collegium of Advocates.
Number of people assisted by the counselling centres in Ingushetia, Daghestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Stavropol Krai and Karachaevo-Cherkessia.	3,595 legal and 5,642 medical and social consultations were provided by counselling centres in the North Caucasus (Chechnya is not included).
Number of cases processed by the courts/applications filled per year and the number of positive court decisions.	194 cases were processed by courts and 130 positive court decisions were recorded in the North Caucasus.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER 2002

The main objectives of the programme remain unchanged with continuing efforts to improve the asylum conditions throughout the Federation. UNHCR will devote careful attention and effort to the issue of return in Ingushetia, ensuring systematic monitoring and timely advocacy with other agencies. Concerns are increasingly registered over the announced 'Action Plan' to further induce

returns of IDPs to Chechnya in the coming months. The authorities must be made acutely aware of the need to respect the principle of voluntary return. If UNHCR's present financial difficulties continue, some 1,500 vulnerable IDP families (7,500 persons) from Chechnya residing in Ingushetia will be negatively impacted and will not receive shelter material. The budgetary cuts may also affect UNHCR's capacity to meet the new shelter needs of the expected returnees.

Financial Data (USD)

Annual Programme Budget			
Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level
15,545,509	15,350,310	8,777,126	6,299,270