

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Develop an asylum system that meets international standards and identify appropriate durable solutions for refugees.
- Facilitate the local integration of various categories of persons covered by the CIS Conference Programme of Action.
- Contribute to meeting the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Northern Caucasus.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

The Asylum System and Durable Solutions for Refugees

The vast majority of asylum-seekers continue to face many difficulties in their quest for protection in the Russian Federation and it is unlikely that significant changes will occur in the foreseeable future. The first six months of the year were, nevertheless, marked by some positive developments. The migration authorities in Moscow and St. Petersburg issued identity cards to several recognised refugees, and certificates for asylum-seekers have also been issued. Moreover, the recognition rate markedly increased. From 1993 until the end of 1999, only 201 cases had been granted refugee status. During the first quarter of 2000, 30 families (68 persons) have already been recognised. This improvement is partially due to the constant support, exchanges and regular training provided by UNHCR to federal and regional institutions directly involved with refugees and asylum-seekers.

Resort to national courts has become an effective protection tool, contributing to the establishment in the Russian Federation of a fair procedure for the determination of refugee status. UNHCR continues to provide support through independent lawyers and legal NGOs to appeals by asylum-seekers lodged against negative decisions on refugee status. However,

the court procedure is very cumbersome and it can take up to six months to get a final decision at each level of jurisdiction. In the first half of the year, UNHCR started to distribute updated country-of-origin information and assessments of claims by individual asylum-seekers to the relevant courts, judges and UNHCR-hired lawyers. The Office actively promoted refugee law and international standards of treatment of refugees through a series of training events.

Considerable progress has been achieved in securing access to education for non-CIS asylum-seeker children. Following a round-table organised jointly by the Moscow City Committee of Education and UNHCR in February, a pilot project was launched to enable some 50 children to begin preparatory classes in a school in Moscow in autumn 2000. This project will be expanded to other schools in 2001 and the expertise gained will be used to develop a methodology for working with asylum-seeker children in the education system.

The opening of the psychological support centre for refugees and asylum-seekers in Moscow at the beginning of the year has contributed to build the confidence of women and children. Children and adolescents in UNHCR-run schools and centres have also been participating in events designed to improve self-esteem and communication skills and to identify potential leaders among the teenagers who will themselves develop activities with their peers in the coming months. In three months, 480 persons participated in these group activities.

The development of community-based assistance projects has run in parallel with the imposition of strict time-limitations for cash assistance. In June, UNHCR decided to implement a policy whereby those included in the programme for the first time would be informed that the assistance was to be provided for a six-month period only.

Drawing from the experience of the pilot phase

at the end of 1999, a standard procedure to assess applications from asylum-seekers and refugees for job training and internships in local businesses was launched during the first quarter of the year. Some 68 asylum-seekers passed the Russian language exam and graduated from training. Enforcement by the Moscow authorities of the obligation to register makes the organisation of internships for asylum-seekers difficult to implement. Nonetheless, during the first six months, UNHCR was able to place 11 asylum-seekers in four small enterprises.

Three different radio programmes were produced which cover refugee and IDP issues, raising UNHCR's visibility in the country and also improving awareness and understanding of the problems of the displaced. These programmes elicit a great deal of response from the public (letters, telephone calls), and one programme received a prestigious national award in radio broadcasting this year for being 'the best cultural programme'. Various publications and supplements to regional newspapers helped to increase public awareness at all levels and specific events were organised to promote refugee rights within the framework of human rights. Close co-operation with national and international media has helped to make UNHCR's role in the Northern Caucasus more visible and better understood.

In the absence of concrete moves by the Georgian Government to facilitate the repatriation of refugees (through appropriate legislation and addressing the issue of property restitution), and owing to poor economic conditions in the places of return, the repatriation movement of refugees from North Ossetia slowed considerably. In the first half of the year only 7 families (13 persons) repatriated to Georgia and South Ossetia with assistance from UNHCR and the Federal Migration Service (FMS).

Georgian and South Ossetian refugees in North Ossetia received legal, social, and health care counselling from the UNHCR-funded Refugee Counselling Centre and its mobile teams throughout the republic. In addition,

through the Centre for Psychological and Educational Rehabilitation of Children, UNHCR helps children of Georgian refugee families to better cope with their social environment. UNHCR assistance in the sectors of health and education mainly targets public institutions in North Ossetia, which serve a large number of Georgian refugees and IDPs.

As part of ongoing Government reforms, the Federal Migration Service was dissolved in July. The Ministry for Federal Affairs, National and Migration Policy of the Russian Federation has been designated to take over the responsibility for all migration matters. This may result in changes in state migration and asylum policy as well as personnel changes. UNHCR is concerned that this may affect FMS eligibility officers from various regions of the country who have been trained by UNHCR on refugee status determination procedures and on many aspects of refugee protection.

UNHCR's financial constraints are currently affecting assistance levels for refugees and asylum-seekers in Moscow. The implementing partner in charge of cash assistance and social programmes has not been able to pay fully for activities and most of the staff has not been remunerated since the beginning of June.

Several PI activities initially planned for the second half of the year has had to be cancelled for lack of funds. These included the production of three successful radio programmes and the 'Refugee Rights Film Monitoring' project, which brought together local authorities, refugees, IDPs and NGOs in various regions of the Russian Federation where non-CIS asylum-seekers, IRPs and IDPs are located. Also, some activities designed to raise the profile of UNHCR during its 50th anniversary have had to be cancelled.

Local Integration of IRPs, IDPs and Formerly Deported Meshketians

UNHCR continued to work towards the local integration of various categories of persons identified in the CIS Conference Programme of Action: Involuntary Relocating Persons

(IRPs), IDPs (such as those from Chechnya as a result of the 1994-1996 hostilities), and Formerly Deported Peoples (FDPs), such as the Meskhetians.

UNHCR's strategy for 2000 focuses on supporting governmental and non-governmental entities to enable the integration of refugees as well as IRPs and IDPs. A number of regional migration services were provided with data-processing equipment, and training on asylum issues was given to government officials, lawyers, and judges. Rehabilitation work was carried out on some temporary accommodation centres, government hostels for the elderly and children, and educational and medical institutions.

To increase the capacities of NGOs, three workshops were conducted on community activities as integration tools for migrants, project management for UNHCR implementing partners, and principles of activities of umbrella organisations. While the first aimed at empowering selected migrant organisations with community-outreach skills to support their continued development as a strong voice for community interests, the latter two focused on increasing the capacity of regional migrant organisations, by improving their structure and capacity to design, implement and expand services for their member organisations and, ultimately, for the migrant community.

The micro-credit lending agencies supported by UNHCR achieved financial self-sufficiency during the first half of the year, which represents a major achievement. This will ease UNHCR's exit from the micro-credit programme. During this period, 1,484 loans were disbursed for a total value of USD 1,087,584, creating or sustaining 2,599 jobs. A joint ILO-UNHCR train-the-trainers' project has been implemented in the field of business development, strengthening the long-term sustainability of the micro-credit project. This project will be handed over to the ILO. Effective dialogue and negotiations between a micro-credit provider supported by UNHCR and lawmakers led the Duma to make grant funds exempt from VAT taxes under the new Tax Code.

UNHCR continued to strengthen local resources to provide legal assistance to Meskhetians with the aim of enabling them to obtain a permanent legal status and to enjoy rights as citizens in accordance with the Federal Law and Constitution. Local integration is the only durable solution envisaged at this stage for most of this group. Locally hired lawyers regularly bring individual cases to district courts. A consultant will assess the extent to which the rights of Meskhetians are respected in the Krasnodar area, which will provide a basis for follow-up action.

At the federal level, UNHCR is pursuing durable solutions for Meskhetians and other *de facto* stateless persons by promoting Russia's accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons. In April, UNHCR participated in the fourth session of the working group drafting a new citizenship law, jointly with the Council of Europe and the Presidential Commission on Citizenship Issues.

Protection and Assistance for IDPs in the Northern Caucasus

During September 1999, hostilities again erupted on the territory of Chechnya, forcing thousands of civilians to flee to Ingushetia and other parts of Russia. The majority (over 250,000 persons) fled to Ingushetia during the winter of 1999-2000.

UNHCR responded rapidly and dispatched convoys of food and non-food relief items to Daghestan and Ingushetia. By the end of June 2000, UNHCR had sent 78 convoys of food and non-food items to IDPs in the North Caucasus region, including two convoys to Chechnya. This represents about 9,500 MTs of food, or a total of USD 6.7 million. UNHCR's contributions in the sectors of shelter, relief, water and sanitation have saved lives and prevented a potential human tragedy. Moreover, through systematic and timely protection interventions in Ingushetia, UNHCR has prevented forced return and the eviction of IDPs, and ensured nearly unhindered access by all displaced peo-

ple to assistance. UNHCR and WFP have also assisted more than 700 returnee families in Chechnya with food and non-food returnee packages.

An overriding concern remains staff security in the region of the Northern Caucasus, which needs to be constantly monitored. This constraint will continue to affect the mobility of expatriate and local staff, and the capacity of UNHCR and implementing partners to operate effectively. The security risks in Chechnya are such that neither international nor national staff can work there. This is the main factor limiting UNHCR's assistance to IDPs and returnees within Chechnya to *ad hoc* cross-border operations, sending in convoys of relief items only after security and needs assessments have taken place.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

The Asylum System and Durable Solutions for Refugees

- Continue to streamline the cash-assistance programme for asylum-seekers.
- Give more attention to self-reliance projects, community services, and local integration and/or resettlement possibilities for refugees.
- Expand self-employment and job-placement programmes to benefit asylum-seekers and refugees, drawing on the success achieved in Russia by UNHCR's micro-credit programme.
- Reduce the planning figure for the number of returnees to Georgia among refugees in North Ossetia from 400-500 families to

300 persons, due to a considerable drop in the number of refugees expressing the wish to repatriate.

- Give priority to local integration for this group, since the recent initiative of the authorities in North Ossetia to allocate land for the local settlement of refugee families has opened new avenues for viable durable solutions for some 360 Georgian refugee families. Although UNHCR's involvement in this activity is essential and urgent, support has not been possible owing to funding constraints.

Local Integration of IRPs, IDPs and Formerly Deported Meskhetians

- Due to financial constraints, halt the further regionalisation of UNHCR activities and instead focus on diversifying programmes in regions where the Office is already present, to include other beneficiaries of concern.
- Link the assistance provided to IRPs and IDPs to progress on refugee and asylum issues.
- Strengthen the capacity of forced-migrant organisations to provide social and legal assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees.

Protection and Assistance for IDPs in the Northern Caucasus

Continued instability and the volatile security situation have prevented large-scale return to Chechnya from Ingushetia during the summer of 2000. UNHCR continues to play a major role in the relief operation for IDPs. Emphasis will be given to local integration and/or voluntary return of the IDPs displaced from Chechnya.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*/**	Total Funds Obligated**
AB and TF	12,900,255	12,450,503	4,630,347	4,617,000
SP	0	14,264,301	5,136,990	3,000,001
TOTAL	12,900,255	26,714,804	9,767,337	7,617,001

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.

**Includes programmes in Northern Caucasus.