

# Russian Federation



## Main objectives

- Support the development of an asylum system that meets international standards.
- Promote accession to the Convention on Statelessness and acquisition of citizenship by stateless persons; assist in their effective integration.
- Identify appropriate durable solutions for refugees and facilitate their integration whenever appropriate.
- Help meet the need for assistance and protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Northern Caucasus.

Planning figures		
Population	Jan 2006	Dec 2006
IDPs in the Northern Caucasus	265,000	220,000
Others of concern <sup>1</sup>	216,900	166,400
<i>De facto</i> stateless persons (Meskhetians in Krasnodar Krai)	7,500	2,000
Refugees	2,120	2,400
Asylum-seekers (pending cases)	400	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>491,920</b>	<b>391,300</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes notably forced migrants, asylum-seekers registered by UNHCR but not yet by the Russian authorities, and returned IDPs.

**Total requirements: USD 15,609,817**



A family of Afghan refugees in St. Petersburg. *UNHCR / V. Sokolova*

## Working environment

### Recent developments

The situation of asylum-seekers has not significantly improved in recent months. UNHCR continues to call for a reduction of the long waiting period preceding refugee status determination (RSD) and seeks to ensure that asylum-seekers

are legally documented when they first approach the migration authorities and throughout the procedure. To ensure a common understanding by all stakeholders of the shortcomings of the process, UNHCR has widely shared its own analysis of the current asylum system in place including identification of the problem areas. UNHCR's intention is to reach a consensus with Government counterparts on priority action required. The Law on Refugees needs to be refined and hopefully



this will be included in the legislative agenda for 2006. In the meantime, since asylum-seekers cannot legally work or access public services, the Office will continue to implement a substantial multi-sectoral assistance programme, including cash assistance for the most vulnerable. UNHCR has improved its cooperation with the Moscow City Migration Service, which deals with a large number of asylum applications. This has resulted in a regular exchange of information with the

UNHCR refugee reception centre. Notable progress was recorded in the field of education, with more places available in local kindergartens, primary schools, evening classes for adolescents and a teacher-training college for school graduates.

In North Ossetia, refugees from Georgia continued to integrate into local society. Together with partners, UNHCR and UNDP have launched a joint integration initiative for (former) refugees in North Ossetia and internally displaced people in Ingushetia, including pilot activities focused on the transition from relief to recovery. As part of this initiative, UNHCR and UNDP have jointly submitted a concept paper to the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security for a three-year programme of sustainable integration and recovery activities in North Ossetia.

In the Northern Caucasus, given the complexity of the humanitarian situation and the level of violence in the region, protection activities remain essential to ensure that the rights of internally displaced people are respected. Since 2004, when the tented camps were closed in Ingushetia, the authorities have maintained their commitment to the principle of voluntary return and the concept of alternative shelter for those who do not wish to return to Chechnya.

In Moscow, UNHCR has been providing legal assistance through a local partner to two categories of *de facto* stateless persons: Baku Armenians (ethnic Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan) who were helped to acquire citizenship or forced migrant status; and those Meskhetians in Krasnodar who will not benefit from the resettlement programme to the United States implemented by IOM.

## Constraints

Substantial backlogs have built up, caused by administrative delays and insufficient human and financial resources at the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation. Refugee recognition rates are very low. Protecting asylum-seekers' rights through courts remains the most efficient course of action. Large numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees continue to

depend on UNHCR for assistance pending consideration of their application under the slow-moving RSD procedure. In 2005, not one single asylum-seeker was granted access to the asylum procedure upon arrival at the international airport in Moscow. Transfer of the responsibility for the Points of Immigration Control to the Federal Border Guards (reporting to the Federal Security Service) may restrict access for UNHCR staff to the airport to ensure protection of arriving asylum-seekers. Within the migration context, the Moscow City government does not prioritize the implementation of fair and efficient asylum procedures. In St. Petersburg (where the procedure used to be better than in Moscow) the city's authorities are now applying increasingly restrictive measures to asylum-seekers. Even documented asylum-seekers and refugees face numerous obstacles (like lack of registration) in trying to work legally and integrate into Russian society. Although all asylum-seeker children have access to local schools, lack of access to legal employment and to public health care severely constrains the potential for self-reliance. No consensus has been reached with the authorities regarding guardianship of unaccompanied minors, as stipulated by the law. Xenophobic tendencies are still on the rise.

In the Northern Caucasus, UNDP implements its area-based recovery programme in three selected districts of North Ossetia. However, a significant number of UNHCR's priority beneficiaries reside outside these three districts, and other partnerships may be necessary to ensure the success of the integration strategy after UNHCR's departure.

The deteriorating situation in Dagestan remains a potential threat to security in the region. Protection activities in Chechnya have been constrained by lack of access, due primarily to concerns about staff safety. Following a UN-led joint security assessment at the end of 2004, a less restrictive security regime may be implemented and would allow the re-establishment of a permanent presence in Grozny in the near future. Until those new measures are implemented, UNHCR can operate inside Chechnya only by "commuting" from Ingushetia and North Ossetia or indirectly through NGO partners.

## Strategy

### Protection, solutions and assistance

The asylum system implemented in the Russian Federation is evolving towards meeting international standards. However, there are several areas that need to be addressed before the system can be deemed fair and efficient and in full compliance with the 1951 Refugee Convention. These areas have been more clearly identified as a result of an analysis of the legal and institutional framework as well as the practice of the relevant actors. UNHCR will continue to advocate dialogue and work with the relevant authorities to address the gaps identified in the legal and institutional framework on access to the territory and admissibility to procedures, establishment of reception centres, documentation, provision of assistance and legal counselling to asylum-seekers, reduction in the waiting periods for decisions on admission and substance of the case. In addition, the Office will support the authorities through various training activities (such as translation/interpretation) and the provision of information on best practices and refugee law.

UNHCR is concentrating its activities in the regions where the highest numbers of persons of concern reside. Those regions are Moscow City and immediate environs, St. Petersburg and the Northern Caucasus.

### Asylum-seekers and refugees

UNHCR will continue to implement a multi-sectoral assistance programme involving education activities, including intensive Russian language training, short vocational training courses and job placement programmes. Pending handover to the state health care system, UNHCR will provide basic medical help through implementing partners. Psychological assistance will complement these activities. The Refugee Reception Centre in Moscow and the Refugee Counselling Centre in St. Petersburg will remain the referral points for asylum-seekers and refugees. Countrywide, UNHCR will support a network of legal counselling centres, focusing not only

on providing legal advice to persons of concern, but also on monitoring the asylum and migration situation in their regions, especially in border areas. Training and capacity-building activities will be implemented for NGOs and government officials. Public awareness and public information activities will continue in Moscow and St. Petersburg and other selected regions. UNHCR protection and programme/community services staff will have to spend considerable time on individual cases, intervening at the airport to prevent *refoulement*; interviewing asylum-seekers in detention centres; expediting resettlements for deportation cases and ensuring that social protection issues are handled sensitively by implementing partners.

Although many refugees in North Ossetia have acquired Russian citizenship and forced migrant status, these solutions will not be durable unless their integration is sustainable. UNHCR will be working closely with its partners on sustainable integration and recovery programmes. UNHCR activities will focus on legal counselling of refugees and forced migrants. UNHCR will also facilitate voluntary repatriation for the few refugees who opt for return to Georgia (South Ossetia).

### Stateless persons

Most of the activities will require close coordination with the Council of Europe and monitoring of the implementation of citizenship legislation. Advocacy and training at the institutional level on statelessness and citizenship issues will continue until progress is made in the accession to the relevant conventions, and until the implementation of the citizenship law and related regulations does effectively ensure prevention and reduction of statelessness. Legal assistance through a local partner will continue for the remaining citizenship cases of Baku Armenians and for an estimated 2,000 Meskhetians likely to remain in Krasnodar Krai after the United States resettlement programme is completed. Complicated citizenship cases for other potentially stateless persons will be assessed and, if necessary, brought before the courts through contracted or implementing partner lawyers.

### Internally displaced people in the Northern Caucasus

UNHCR will ensure that all returns to Chechnya are voluntary; that IDPs not willing to return have a right to remain in Ingushetia or elsewhere in the Russian Federation and to integrate there if they so choose; and that the rights of internally displaced people and returnees as Russian citizens are observed.

UNHCR and its implementing partners will continue to monitor the protection situation of the internally displaced in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. Increased protection monitoring of IDPs who have returned to Chechnya will provide more accurate assessments and facilitate intervention on individual cases where required. The reasonably successful approach to protection interventions that has been achieved for IDPs in Ingushetia is expected to be duplicated for returnees in Chechnya. Shelter and quick impact project activities will support the reintegration of returnees. In Ingushetia, the joint integration initiative will assist internally displaced people who opt to settle permanently in the republic.

All activities are designed in a way that addresses the Five Commitments to Refugee Women. This includes active engagement of women in management of refugee and IDP communities; proper documentation of asylum-seekers and refugees approaching UNHCR; involvement of women in distribution of food and non-food items and access to sanitary supplies. UNHCR in the Russian Federation developed and currently implements a countrywide strategy to address sexual and gender-based violence. As part of the UN Country Team, UNHCR is involved in the work of the thematic groups on HIV/AIDS, Human Rights and Poverty Eradication. UNHCR's activities and cooperation with other agencies address the Millennium Development Goals and in particular the following: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, universal primary education, gender equality and empowerment of women, and combating HIV/AIDS.

## Desired impact

Together with the authorities, UNHCR aims to tackle systematically the most important protection gaps in the asylum regime in the Russian Federation. The Office will advance the process through the introduction of additional tools and activities such as the strengthening of legal support, the establishment of a pilot project to promote local integration and the development of a country of origin information facility, ensuring observation of minimum standards in protection and assistance of asylum-seekers and recognized refugees. Asylum-seekers and refugees will be able to access the state medical care system. The joint integration initiative for refugees and forced migrants in North Ossetia will allow gradual disengagement of UNHCR from assistance activities, so that it can focus on strengthening the asylum system in the Northern Caucasus. Potentially stateless people will have access to legal counselling and will be assisted with acquisition of citizenship. In the Northern Caucasus the authorities will remain committed to the concept of alternative shelter; returns to Chechnya will be voluntary. Public information activities will raise awareness of migration and asylum issues to contribute towards a more positive attitude towards asylum-seekers and refugees. Partner staff and Government counterparts will continue to benefit from training and joint planning exercises to enhance their knowledge and skills in protection delivery and strengthening of the asylum system. It is expected that private donors will contribute more towards refugee programmes.

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## Organization and implementation

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### Management structure

UNHCR in the Russian Federation will function with 91 staff: 11 international, 53 national, three JPOs, 22 UNVs (four international and 18 national), one consultant and one secondee.

### Coordination

UNHCR works closely with relevant intergovernmental organizations and other United Nations agencies in the Russian Federation. Close liaison is maintained with OCHA, the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), ICRC and increasingly with other agencies engaged in longer-term recovery projects (UNDP, ILO, FAO and others) in the Northern Caucasus. There is routine coordination with partners through regular multi-sectoral meetings in Moscow and coordination meetings in the Northern Caucasus on protection, shelter and general issues. At the governmental level, regular contacts are maintained with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and its Federal Migration Service and the regional migration departments, with the Governments of North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya, and with the Moscow City Department of Education.

Offices
<b>Moscow</b>
Nazran
Vladikavkaz

### Partners

**Governmental agencies**  
 Federal Migration Service of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation  
 Moscow City Education Department  
 Departments of Social Services and Migration of the Governments of Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia

**NGOs**  
 Association of Media Managers  
 Caucasian Refugee Council  
 Children's Fund  
 Civic Assistance  
 Danish Refugee Council  
*Dobroye Delo*  
*Doverie*  
 Ethnosphera Centre  
 Faith, Hope and Love  
 Gratis Psychological Support Centre  
 Guild of Russian Filmmakers  
 Magee Woman Care International  
 Memorial Human Rights Legal Centre  
*Nizam*  
*Opora*  
 Peace to the Caucasus  
*Pomostch*  
 Solidarity  
 Stichting Chechnya Justice Initiative  
 St. Petersburg Centre for International Cooperation of the Red Cross  
 St. Petersburg Red Cross  
 Vesta

**Others**  
 IOM  
 UNV

Budget (USD)	
Activities and services	Annual Programme Budget
Protection, monitoring and coordination	3,720,107
Community services	810,417
Domestic needs	778,883
Education	634,549
Health	1,031,306
Income generation	35,469
Legal assistance	3,888,706
Operational support (to agencies)	963,259
Shelter/other infrastructure	1,267,456
Transport/logistics	376,469
<b>Total operations</b>	<b>13,506,621</b>
Programme support	2,103,196
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,609,817</b>