

Russian Federation



Operational highlights

- Durable solutions were found for 685 refugees and asylum-seekers through resettlement to third countries.
- UNHCR provided assistance to approximately 3,900 asylum-seekers in Moscow and St. Petersburg while the authorities determined their status.
- More than 600 displaced families in the northern Caucasus benefited from UNHCR's shelter programme.

Persons of concern

Type of population	Origin	Total	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Afghanistan	1,200	1,200	-	-
Asylum-seekers	Afghanistan	200	200	-	-
IDPs		158,900	158,900	-	-
Stateless	Stateless	56,700	-	-	-
	Meskhetians	10,300	10,300	-	-
Others of concern	Forced migrants excluding IDPs	131,900	51,600	-	-
	Afghans in a refugee-like situation	100,000	-	-	-
	Asylum-seekers of concern to UNHCR	3,900	3,900	-	-
Total		463,100	226,100		

- A total of 65 refugees and asylum-seekers voluntarily repatriated.
- All people of concern in the northern Caucasus had access to free legal counselling.
- UNHCR launched a high-profile campaign promoting the Russian Federation's accession to the two UN Conventions on Statelessness.

- Promote accession to the Conventions on statelessness and acquisition of citizenship by stateless people; and assist in their local integration.
- Identify appropriate durable solutions for refugees and facilitate their integration whenever appropriate.
- Help meet the assistance needs and protection of IDPs in the northern Caucasus.

Working environment

Effective migration management continued to be a high priority for the Government of the Russian Federation and a number of legal acts related to migration were approved in 2006. These new regulations are expected to affect the lives of refugees and asylum-seekers, in particular with regard to the very limited employment opportunities available to them.

In late 2005, legislative amendments introduced new requirements for all national and international NGOs to register their activities and provide details on their funding sources. These new regulations came into effect in 2006 and initially provoked much anxiety among NGOs due to the cumbersome registration process. Eventually most of UNHCR's NGO partners were able to register.

The situation of asylum-seekers has not improved significantly and refugee recognition rates continued to remain low in 2006. A substantial backlog of asylum applications has built up, caused by administrative delays and the lack of staff and funds at the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation. Large groups of asylum-seekers and refugees continue to depend on UNHCR for assistance pending consideration of their applications during lengthy protracted refugee status determination (RSD) procedures.

The security situation in the northern Caucasus showed some improvement in 2006. The United Nations lowered its security alert level in Chechnya from Phase V to IV. UNHCR's presence in Grozny is expected to follow suit.

Achievements and impact

Main objectives

UNHCR's main objectives in the Russian Federation in 2006 were to:

- Support the continuous development of an asylum system that meets international standards.

Protection and solutions

UNHCR concentrated its activities in the regions where the highest numbers of people of concern live. Those regions are Moscow city and its immediate surroundings, St. Petersburg and the northern Caucasus.

Meetings held in Moscow in April 2006 between UNHCR and officials from the State Duma and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs served to promote the Russian Federation's accession to the two UN Conventions on Statelessness. UNHCR will continue to work with the Russian authorities to consider accession since the national legal system already has many provisions that are compatible with the standards of these two Conventions.

Protection and legal counselling for asylum-seekers and refugees was provided through the Refugee Reception Centre in Moscow, the Refugee Counselling Centre in St. Petersburg and a network of implementing partners working in both the capital and in the regions. UNHCR continued to refer asylum-seekers to the national migration services for processing of their claims. In view of the slow processing of applications and the restricted implementation of the 1951 Refugee Convention, UNHCR made mandate decisions for those applicants that required UNHCR's intervention.

In the course of 2006, collaboration with the judiciary led to a substantial number of positive decisions on various aspects of the asylum procedure. This strengthened the case for review of asylum legislation to bring it further in line with international standards. The systematic provision of legal advice to asylum-seekers facilitated greater access to the judicial system. As a result, asylum-seekers gained confidence in the legal process.

In the northern Caucasus, protection activities undertaken directly by UNHCR or through legal counselling centres continued to focus on direct intervention, monitoring, information dissemination and capacity building, such as the successful training of judges from Ingushetia and Chechnya. Free legal aid allowed IDPs to pursue their cases in courts. The Chechen Ombudsman's Office also provided free legal aid for a limited number of IDPs.

Activities and assistance

Community services: UNHCR continued to support community centres for refugees and asylum-seekers in Moscow and its environs and in St. Petersburg. In 2006 two community centres were remodelled in Moscow and St. Petersburg, with the consolidation of services in order to better serve those in need of assistance. Approximately 200 refugees and asylum-seekers attended literacy and Russian language classes.

Domestic needs and household support: The beneficiaries of financial and material aid included people of concern in detention, in hospital and those awaiting resettlement. More than 6,100 food kits were distributed in Moscow in 2006. An average of 20 people per month in Moscow and St. Petersburg received emergency assistance. All women asylum-seekers in Moscow and St. Petersburg received sanitary supplies on a regular basis.

Education: All asylum-seeker and refugee children had access to public education with no discrimination related to their parents' legal status. UNHCR continued to pay the school fees of some 450 primary and 230 secondary students.

Health and nutrition: UNHCR provided more than 2,100 asylum-seekers and refugees in Moscow and St. Petersburg with basic health care, including vaccination of all school-age children. More than 1,900 refugees and asylum-seekers were referred to other medical institutions.

Income generation: UNHCR assisted asylum-seekers and refugees in Moscow to access vocational skills training and language courses in order to increase their chances of finding employment. In Moscow, 29 asylum-seekers underwent short-term skills training courses.

Legal assistance: UNHCR continued to provide legal counselling through a refugee reception centre and a refugee counselling centre. These centres registered asylum-seekers and refugees, screened cases for resettlement and voluntary repatriation, and addressed incidents involving law enforcement agencies, xenophobic attacks and detention. The centres also referred cases to UNHCR's partners for follow-up. Both centres are also responsible for maintaining working contacts with the migration authorities in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Similar support was provided elsewhere in the Russian Federation via a network of legal counselling centres supported by UNHCR.

Sexual and gender-based violence cases reported to UNHCR were given priority attention. Specific training was organized for the Office's implementing partners in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia-Alania.

Resettlement continued to be an important tool for finding durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in the Russian Federation. A total of 685 people were resettled in 2006. In addition, the group resettlement programme submitted more than 430 applications to the Canadian authorities, representing a total of over 1,000 people.

Shelter and infrastructure: More than 600 displaced families in the northern Caucasus benefited from UNHCR's shelter programme. From 2002 to the end of December 2006, UNHCR distributed more than 2,000 temporary shelter kits to IDP families in Ingushetia and returnees to Chechnya. Minor emergency repairs were undertaken at seven temporary settlements hosting IDPs in Ingushetia.

A programme designed to provide vulnerable persons of concern with construction materials to repair roofs and build at least one dry room continued and benefited 113 families in Chechnya.

In Ingushetia, in an effort to assist the local integration of the uprooted population from Chechnya and North Ossetia, more than 42 houses were constructed. A similar programme was completed in North Ossetia benefiting 23 people of concern to UNHCR, most of whom were refugees from Georgia.

Operational support (to agencies): Public information activities continued to promote a more tolerant attitude towards refugees and asylum-seekers in the Russian Federation. UNHCR targeted various audiences, such as journalists writing on migration issues, civil servants, NGOs, teachers and schoolchildren.

Constraints

Despite continuous advocacy efforts, reception conditions for asylum-seekers are still inadequate. The reception conditions for asylum-seekers at the airport in Moscow further deteriorated, with prolonged stays in the transit zone without basic hygienic and accommodation facilities. As in previous years, access to public medical care is nearly impossible, except for emergency assistance, and UNHCR had to continue a costly medical assistance programme through implementing partners. The lack of official documentation for asylum-seekers during the long waiting period preceding RSD, often for up to two years, remains an important issue. For unaccompanied children, access to the RSD process remains a challenge even though UNHCR has taken up the role of guardian to facilitate the procedure. As prospects for local integration of refugees are minimal, resettlement in third countries remains the most viable durable solution for refugees.

The Government took a stronger position against xenophobia and racism, and there were fewer incidents



UNHCR/Makeeva

Chechen Rosa Mukhaeva lived with her four children in a train carrier and later in a tented camp in Ingushetia for two years. Upon return to Chechnya, she was accommodated in this “tent box” by UNHCR.

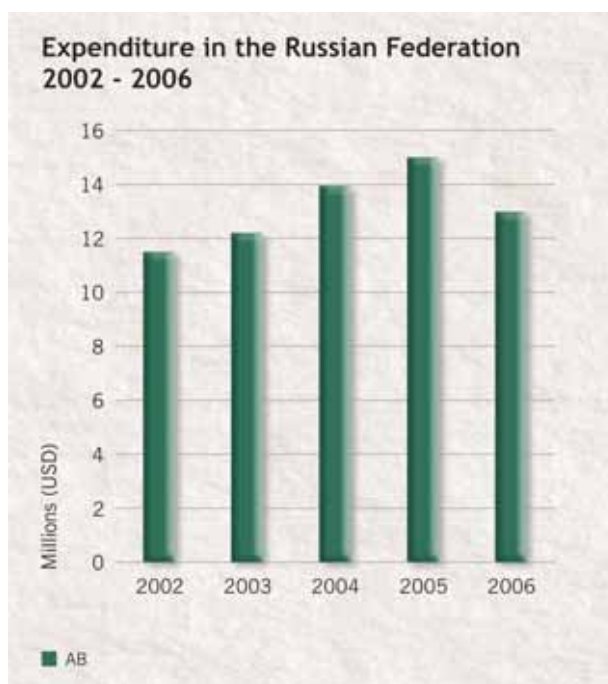
involving law enforcement agencies. However, xenophobic and racist tendencies were still prevalent among the general population and in the mass media. In 2006, UNHCR Moscow received three confirmed reports of racist attacks on mandate refugees.

In the northern Caucasus, during the second half of the year, overall security conditions continued to improve, with a decline in the number of security-related incidents. However, despite the lowering of the UN security alert level and the prospect of easier access for humanitarian staff to the displaced in Chechnya, heavily armed security escorts were imposed by the Russian authorities on UN staff movements, thus hampering their monitoring tasks. As a result, it became extremely difficult to follow up on individual cases and to monitor the registration of returnees from abroad. Similarly, restrictions on the movements of humanitarian staff hampered access to beneficiaries and impeded the monitoring of integration projects in North Ossetia-Alania.

Financial Information

Funding was largely sufficient to cover UNHCR’s priority activities in 2006. UNHCR’s activities for IDPs in the northern Caucasus continued to be an integral part of the Inter-Agency Transitional Work Plan, which replaced the former Consolidated Appeals Process. Donor interest was focused for the most part on UNHCR’s activities for IDPs, with almost all contributions being earmarked for the northern Caucasus.

UNHCR’s expenditure in the Russian Federation over the last five years has remained fairly constant, with slight increases recorded in 2004 and 2005. The Office’s involvement in the northern Caucasus is one of its largest operations in Europe. A decrease in overall expenditure in 2006 was mainly due to the capping of UNHCR’s budget, while donors continued to make earmarked contributions to UNHCR’s IDP operation in the Russian Federation.



Organization and implementation

Management

In 2006, UNHCR in the Russian Federation operated through its Representation in Moscow, one sub-office in Vladikavkaz and one field office in Nazran, with a total of 69 staff members. In addition, 17 United Nations Volunteers and two secondees worked for UNHCR. In order to ensure a more effective and regular monitoring of the situation of thousands of returnees and displaced people in Chechnya, UNHCR requested the opening of an office in Grozny in December 2006, and was awaiting a response from the Russian authorities by the end of the year.

Working with others

UNHCR continued to pursue its main objectives by engaging in active dialogue with implementing and operational partners and maintaining close cooperation with other UN agencies and international organizations in the Russian Federation. UNHCR had agreements with 19 non-governmental implementing partners in 2006 and worked closely with the federal authorities (notably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Migration Service), and local authorities especially through the Inter-Agency Transitional Work Plan. Furthermore, the Office continued to coordinate protection and shelter activities in the northern Caucasus.

Overall assessment

In recent years, UNHCR has played a key role in assisting and protecting the rights of various groups of concern to the Office. Despite the difficult working environment, UNHCR managed to make a difference to the lives of its beneficiaries. The Office worked to support such issues as access to local education for asylum-seekers and refugees; integration of recognized refugees; voluntary return for IDPs (i.e. their freedom to

choose their place of abode); and overall protection of the rights of people of concern. The authorities of the Russian Federation continued to regard UNHCR as a valuable partner in protecting and assisting refugees in urban areas and in the northern Caucasus. Repatriation of Afghan and Georgian refugees from the Russian Federation reached one of the lowest recorded levels over the last few years.

However, in response to UNHCR's continued advocacy for the rights of asylum-seekers, courts took a number of important decisions in the course of 2006 obliging the authorities to respect due process in cases of asylum applications, deportation and extradition, as well as respecting IDPs' rights.

Meetings with government officials have paved the way for a new strategic partnership between UNHCR and the Russian Federation, particularly in the fields of emergency response, statelessness, and financial support for the Office's activities worldwide.

Partners

Implementing partners

NGOs: Association of Media Managers, Caucasian Refugee Council, Children's Fund (North-Ossetia Alania and Stavropol), Civic Assistance, Danish Refugee Council, Equilibre Solidarity, Etnosfera, Faith-Hope-Love, Guild of Russian Filmmakers, Magee Womancare International, Memorial Human Rights Centre, *Nizam*, Peace to the Caucasus, *Pomosch*, Psychological Support Centre Gratis, St. Petersburg Red Cross Centre for International Cooperation, St. Petersburg Society of the Red Cross, Stichting Russian Justice Initiative, *Vesta*.

Others: IOM, UNV.

Operational partners

Government agencies: Departments of Migration Issues of the Federal Migration Service in the regions, Federal Migration Service of the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation, Governments of the Chechen Republic and the Republics of Ingushetia and North Ossetia Alania, Moscow City Education Department, Ombudsman of the Chechen Republic, Ombudsman of the Russian Federation.

Others: Council of Europe, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNV.

Budget, income and expenditure (USD) Annual programme budget

Final budget	Income from contributions ¹	Other funds available ²	Total funds available	Total expenditure
15,379,981	7,820,988	5,153,336	12,974,325	12,974,325

¹ Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

² Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects	Previous years' projects
	AB	AB and SB
Protection, monitoring and coordination	3,205,582	0
Community services	527,563	201,383
Domestic needs and household support	421,441	14,403
Education	376,352	74,797
Health and nutrition	681,497	260,815
Income generation	19,238	3,584
Legal assistance	2,502,216	915,272
Operational support (to agencies)	670,611	268,328
Shelter and infrastructure	981,439	886,030
Transport and logistics	0	106,606
Instalments with implementing partners	1,778,237	(2,731,218)
Sub-total operational activities	11,164,176	0
Programme support	1,810,148	0
Total expenditure	12,974,325	0
Cancellation on previous years' expenditure		(31,247)
Instalments with implementing partners		
Payments made	5,761,863	
Reporting received	(3,983,626)	
Balance	1,778,237	
Previous years' report		
Instalments with implementing partners		
Outstanding 1st January		2,837,581
Reporting received		(2,731,218)
Refunded to UNHCR		(58,771)
Adjustments		(45,129)
Balance		2,463