

# EDUCATION AT RISK IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS:

Adygheya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya,  
Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia,  
North Ossetia-Alania and Chechnya

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**Dr. Irina Molodikova**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ESP	Education Support Program
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OSI	Open Society Institute
SC	Save the Children
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“In Chechnya now – rural values prevail over urban. A half-educated and ignorant boy with a gun is more respected than an elderly person, a thief is more successful than an honest farmer, and the opinion of a village mullah is more influential than the rule of law.”<sup>1</sup>*

This study examines the education of children at-risk in the Northern Caucasus republics. It aims to identify specific groups of children at-risk and examine factors hindering their full participation in education. This study discussed the findings within the larger issues of access to and quality of education provision in the Northern Caucasus Republics of the Russian Federation, including Adygeya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania, and Chechnya. This study draws on the quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of information sources, including existing statistical data, document analysis, and interviews with forty six education experts (principals of schools, local authorities, officials, and NGO activists), and focus groups with 125 teachers in rural and urban areas.

The Northern Caucasus is one of the most disadvantaged regions of the Russian Federation. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Northern Caucasus republics have experienced major economic decline, increasing levels of poverty, and high unemployment rates, all of which have been further aggravated by prolonged military hostilities and ethnic tension. The political, economic, and social instability of the 1990s and 2000s have led to the rapid deterioration of education provision, and placed many children and youth at risk of having limited or no access to quality education.

While the Northern Caucasus republics mirror general problems of education development related to the post-Soviet transition processes – a mismatch between curriculum and outcomes, antiquated teaching/learning methods, a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers, increasing private costs of education, a lack of preschool education, widespread corruption, and deteriorating school infrastructure – the depth and breadth of these problems is often far more pronounced in the Northern Caucasus region. In addition, the Northern Caucasus republics face region-specific education problems such as post-conflict trauma and deteriorating quality of Russian-language instruction. Combined, these multiple problems put children and youth in the Northern Caucasus republics at risk, further hindering socioeconomic development, political stability, and social cohesion of the Northern Caucasus republics.

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<sup>1</sup> Tishkov, V., *Obschestvo v voruzhennom konflikte [Society in an armed conflict]*. (Moscow: Nauka, 2001): p. 533.

While every republic has its own combination of groups of children at-risk, this study has identified some commonalities across the region. The most frequently identified groups of children at-risk include (1) children from low-income and poor families, (2) victims of military conflicts and ethnic tensions, (3) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), (4) children with disabilities and health problems, and (5) children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families.

Given the intensity of education-related problems and the variety of children at-risk groups in the Northern Caucasus republics, this study recommends using a two-pronged approach to education assistance in the region. This approach should seek to combine an improvement of the overall education environment in each republic with specific action plans for the most vulnerable groups of children (for example, children in rural areas, children with disabilities, and others). In particular, it is important to consider the following broad recommendations:

- **Increase access to social and education integration opportunities for vulnerable and marginalized children and youth**
  - To organize “early weekend educational centers” in order to improve school preparation for preschool age children.
  - To organize special education and professional colleges (centers) for children who dropped out of the education system.
  - To continue the implementation of rehabilitation and integration programs for children and teachers affected by war.
  - To promote the adoption and implementation of more inclusive education policies for children with disabilities.
  - To increase opportunities for disadvantaged youth (for example, children from rural areas) to study in higher education institutions.
  
- **To improve the school learning environment for all children**
  - To support physical rehabilitation of school facilities.
  - To introduce a system of “Green computers” to improve student access to information.<sup>2</sup>
  - To create an extracurricular system in schools and encourage extracurricular activities between the various regions of the NCR to promote tolerance.

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<sup>2</sup> For more details see: <http://laptop.org/vision/index.shtml>

- **Provide regular professional development opportunities for teachers and academics**
  - Provide regular opportunities for in-service teacher training programs.
  - Increase the motivation of teachers through financial and professional incentives.
  - To support the academic and professional development of intelligentsia from the Northern Caucasus republics by creating a special department of the Caucasus studies in one of the well established universities in Russia.
  
- **Introduce Russian as a second language instruction in schools**
  - To increase the number of higher education students in the programs/departments preparing teachers of Russian and national languages/literatures.
  - To organize professional development opportunities for school teachers in the methodology of using Russian as a second language of instruction.



# I – INTRODUCTION

The Northern Caucasus is a multiethnic region, a crossroads of cultures and interests, with the hopes and interests of many, diverse ethnic groups leading to much conflict. Administratively, the region consists of the Russian republics of the Northern Caucasus, including the Southern Federal District, consisting of Rostov oblast, Krasnodar Krai, and Stavropol Krai, and the constituent republics of Adygheya, Karachai-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia-Alania, Ingushetiya, Chechnya, and Dagestan. The Northern Caucasus republics border Georgia and Azerbaijan (see Figure 1). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, relations between Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have become increasingly complicated. During the last 15 years, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Northern Caucasus Republics (NRC) of the Russian Federation have experienced war and other conflicts, leading to deterioration of living conditions, economic crises, and a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In some of the republics of the Northern Caucasus, militia activities occur nearly every week, and conflicts between different ethnic groups and/or local warlords and the federal center erupt on a regular basis.

*Figure 1.*  
*Map of the Northern Caucasus*



The economic crises and political unrest of the 1990s and 2000s have led to the deterioration of education provision and placed many children and youth at risk of having limited or no access to quality education. While the Northern Caucasus republics mirror general education problems in the Russian Federation and other republics of the former Soviet Union – a mismatch between the curriculum, common teaching methods, and desired educational outcomes; a lack of professional development opportunities for teachers, increasing private costs of education, corruption, and other problems – the depth and breadth of these problems is often far more pronounced in the Northern Caucasus region (World Bank, 2006). This makes children and youth in the Northern Caucasus republics especially disadvantaged, negatively affecting their future education and employment opportunities.

### **1.1. Goals and objectives of the report**

The purpose of this report is to examine the issues of access to and quality of education provision in the Northern Caucasus Republics of the Russian Federation, including Adygeya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania and Chechnya. More specifically, this report aims to identify the groups of children at-risk and examine factors hindering their full participation in education. In particular, this report examines the following questions:

- How did the transition period impact education opportunities for children and youth in the Northern Caucasus?
- What factors hinder children's access to quality education?
- Which groups of children are most affected by a lack of access to education and/or lack of access to quality education?
- How could access to quality education be enhanced for at-risk-children? What institutions could provide assistance, and what kind of education assistance is necessary and most appropriate?

### **1.2. Survey methodology**

This study investigates education of at-risk children through a combination of different methodological approaches to account for the complexity of the political, economic, and social context of the Northern Caucasus region. In particular, the study draws on (1) structural interviews with 46 education experts in the field of education, (2) focus groups with 125 school teachers, (3) qualitative analysis of reflection essays written by teachers about the changing status of education during the transition period, and (4) an analysis of the existing statistical data.

First, expert interviews targeted a total of 46 individuals, including 28 school administrators (i.e., school directors and senior teachers), 14 representatives of the local administration, and four representatives of federal authorities (i.e., three Ministers of Education and one Deputy Minister of Education). Second, a total of 20 focus groups were conducted reaching 125 teachers of primary and secondary schools. Given the significant differences in education opportunities between urban and rural areas, this study targeted at least one urban and one rural settlement in each republic for expert interviews and focus groups. School administrators were not encouraged to participate in focus groups to avoid intimidation of participating teachers and to create a welcoming, friendly atmosphere for informal conversation. The majority of the interviews were conducted by psychologists and lecturers of higher education institutions in the relevant region. The objective was to choose interviewers who have the highest credibility among teachers and are most aware of the national and cultural differences in the Northern Caucasus republics.

Third, teachers were asked to write short essays about their reflections on the changing status of education and the teaching profession during the transition period. These essays provided an opportunity for teachers to voice their opinions on how to address the rapidly deteriorating quality of education in their specific school settings. In addition to the qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups, and essays, the study used federal statistical data on education and analyzed reports from relevant international organizations working in the region. Most data was collected during the summer and early fall of 2007.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3. Overview of the report**

The report is organized around five chapters. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 sketches the background for the study and discusses the evolving political and socioeconomic situation of children and youth in the Northern Caucasus republics. Chapter 3 provides an overview of education trends in the Northern Caucasus republics since transition, highlighting interregional comparisons and contrasts in education of children and youth. Chapter 4 focuses more specifically on the experiences and needs of disadvantaged children and youth and identifies specific groups of children at-risk, as well as analyzes the factors hindering access to quality of education for all children in the Northern Caucasus. Finally, the concluding chapter identifies feasible strategies and entry points for increasing support to education development and increasing access to and quality of education for all children.

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<sup>3</sup> *In particular, expert interviews and focus groups were conducted in May-June, 2007, while essays were collected and analyzed during the first two weeks of September, 2007.*





## **2 – BACKGROUND: THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL FACTORS ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS**

Although the Northern Caucasus is a diverse region, its constituent republics share a common set of characteristics. Based on the socioeconomic and educational indicators, the Northern Caucasus republics could be grouped into three clusters. Adygheya enjoys the most favorable socioeconomic situation, with its indices of socio-economic and educational development approximating the average for the Russian Federation.<sup>4</sup> The region is located inside the Krasnodar krai, which has dynamic economic development and will be the center of the winter Olympic Games in 2014. The next group consists of North Ossetia–Alania (without the Prigorodnyi district), Karachaevo–Cherkessia, and Kabardino–Balkaria, where socioeconomic indices are two times worse than the average for Russia. However, these republics witnessed improvement trends over the last five years. The group with the lowest socioeconomic performance in Russia consists of Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Dagestan, and the Prigorodnyi district of the North Ossetia–Alania.

Taking into consideration contextual differences and similarities between the constituent republics of the Northern Caucasus region, this section presents a comparative analysis of the political, economic, and social factors which affect education provision in the region. This section pays particular attention to (1) the role of urban centers in education development, (2) socioeconomic development, (3) demographic changes and trends, (4) multiethnicity and its challenges to the education systems, and (5) conflicts and their role in education development.

### **2.1. Cities as education centers**

The level of urbanization is one of the key indicators of modernization because human, social, and economic capital is generally concentrated in cities. From this perspective, the proportion of urban population to the overall population could be an indirect indicator of the potential availability of quality education. Examined within this context, the Northern Caucasus Republics are at a clear disadvantage compared to the rest of the Russian Federation. For example, the proportion of the urban population in the Russian Federation comprises on average 72.9%, while it does not exceed 40% in most of the Northern Caucasus republics (see Table 1). The proportion of urban population varies by republic, with North Ossetia-Alania and

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<sup>4</sup> *Rosstat*, Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The main socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume]. (*Moskva: Rosstat, 2006*).

Adygheya having the largest proportion of urban population (64.7% and 52.5% respectively) and Chechnya the lowest (34.3%).

In all Northern Caucasus republics, capital cities are the largest cities, logically accumulating the highest share of the urban population. Of all Northern Caucasus republics, Dagestan has the most developed system of higher education and vocational institutions, mainly because the Republic has several middle-size cities in addition to the capital. Higher education is available in six state higher education institutions and nine private higher education institutions. With the exception of Dagestan, the non-capital urban settlements in the Northern Caucasus are small and largely undeveloped as education centers due to a lack of human capital, including qualified teachers and higher education lecturers. Thus, the number of higher education institutions in Kabardino-Balkaria is limited to four, followed by three in Ingushetiya and Chechnya, two in Karachai-Cherkessiya, and only one in Adygea (see Table 5). Undoubtedly, this inhibits the dissemination of knowledge, which depends on a strong network of urban settlements and infrastructure.

**Table 1.**  
*General demographic and labor characteristics in the Northern Caucasus Republics, 2005.*

Population, thousands (2006)	Population in capital cities, thousands (2006)	% of urban population (2005)	% of population in capital cities (2006)	Calculated unemployment rate, % (ILO)	Registered unemployment rate, %	Index of net migration (in 10.000's)	
<b>Russia</b>							
142753,5	Moscow	10425,1	72,9	7,3	7,6	2,5	9
<b>South Federal Okrug (SFO)</b>							
22790,3	Rostov-on-Don	1054,8	57,0	4,6	14,2	5,8	3
<b>Adygheya</b>							
442,7	Maikop	156,8	52,6	35,4	12,9	4,9	11
<b>Dagestan</b>							
2641,0	Makhachkala	466,3	42,7	17,7	22,3	4,6	-23
<b>Ingushetiya</b>							
487,0	Magas*	0,3	42,7	0,1	64,9	23,9	9
<b>Kabardino-Balkaria</b>							
894,0	Nalchik	271,4	44,2	30,4	23,4	9,1	-32
<b>Karachai-Cherkessiya</b>							
431,5	Cherkessk	116,9	44,1	27,1	13,6	3,4	-71
<b>North Ossetia-Alania</b>							
702,3	Vladikavkaz	314,1	64,7	44,7	8,8	4,6	-18
<b>Chechnya</b>							
1162,8	Grozni	218,2	34,3	18,8	74,2	74,2	-12

\*Magas became the capital of Ingushetiya after the republic had gained independence. Nazran, a city with 130.2 thousand population, that was the second largest city in Chechnya - Ingushetiya republic, continues to play a significant cultural and educational role in today's Ingushetiya.

**Source:** Rosstat, *Osnovnye sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazатели: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The primary socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume]. (Moskva: Rosstat, 2006).*

## 2.2. Socioeconomic development

A high level of officially recognized and registered unemployment highlights the unfavorable socioeconomic situation in the North Caucasus republics. Compared to the Russian Federation, the unemployment rate in the Northern Caucasus is considerably higher, 7.2% and 11.6% respectively (see Table 2). It is comparable to the Russian average only in Adygheya (12.9%) and North Ossetia-Alania (8.8%), but substantially exceeds it in Ingushetiya (64.9%), Kabardino-Balkaria (23.4%), and Dagestan (22.3%). Similarly, the prospects of finding employment in the Northern Caucasus republics are much lower than in the Russian Federation. For example, the percentage of unemployed people searching for a job for more than a year is 38.5% in the Russian Federation compared to over 60% in Adygheya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessiya, and North Ossetia-Alania (see Table 2). Furthermore, it is important to note that the black market entailing self-employment without tax payment is flourishing in many of the Northern Caucasus republics. Therefore, the official level of unemployment may not reflect the real situation.

Of all Northern Caucasus republics, Adygheya may have slightly more favorable prospects for socioeconomic development because of its geographic proximity to the Krasnodar region, which will become the site of the Olympic Games in 2014. In preparation for the Games, an estimated amount of US12 billion dollars will be invested in the development of the Krasnodar region.<sup>5</sup> This will positively impact the socioeconomic development of the region, including modernization of the regional service industry the construction of a complex infrastructure of sports facilities, which will bring about the rapid development of the Krasnodar region and Adygheya. Similarly, an Integral Index of Investment Risks for 2004-2006<sup>6</sup> places Adygheya in a more advantaged socioeconomic position compared to the lowest scoring Chechnya and Ingushetiya. With the exception of Adygheya, then, major economic investments in the Northern Caucasus are highly unlikely in the near future, further complicating prospects for education development.

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<sup>5</sup> Protopopov, A., *Absolutely non-Olympic principle*, *Expert*, 26 (2007): 9.

<sup>6</sup> The Index was developed by the journal "Expert" and covers 89 constituent parts of the Russian Federation. The Index is comprised of a sum of scores of investment risk components (political, economic, financial, social, criminal, environmental, administrative, and legislative) for the years 2005 and 2006. For more information, see [www.raexpert.ru/ratings/regions/](http://www.raexpert.ru/ratings/regions/).

**Table 2.**  
*Socioeconomic Indices of Development  
in the Northern Caucasus Republics and Russia, 2005*

% of economically active population	Unemployment rate, %	Average time searching for job, %	% of unemployed people searching for job more than 12 months	Average monthly income in rubles (in USD)	Average monthly wages, in rubles (in USD)	% of population with income below the poverty line	Personal cars per 1000 people	Number of computers per 100 households	Number of mobile phones per 1000 people
<b>Russia</b>									
65,8	7,2	8,6	38,5	8023,2 (298)	8554,9 (319)	...	169,0	26	865,5
<b>Southern Federal Okrug (SFO)</b>									
62,3	11,6	9,7	...	5337,5 (199)	5800,3 (216)	...	146,7	18	841,7
<b>Adygheya</b>									
59,7	12,9	11,7	63,9	3875,0 (144)	5123,0 (191)	34,0	167,8	20	886,0
<b>Dagestan</b>									
64,3	22,3	11,7	63,8	4736,1 (174)	3659,8 (136)	22,1	55,4	6	132,2
<b>Ingushetiya</b>									
61,9	64,9	8,7	30,9	2480,5 (92.5)	5448,9 (202)	61,3	57,7	6	38,4
<b>Kabardino-Balkaria</b>									
57,8	23,4	12,1	64,2	4061 (149)	4653,3 (173)	24,7	108,0	4	232,9
<b>Karachai-Cherkessiya</b>									
62,8	13,6	12,9	75,7	4266,3 (159)	4710,1 (176)	26,6	137,4	7	122,2
<b>North Ossetia-Alania</b>									
62,2	8,8	12,0	65,5	4678,1 (174.5)	4722,3 (176)	13,8	141,6	15	532,4
<b>Chechnya</b>									
...	...	...	...	...	6715,9 (258)	...	47,8	...	24,5*

*Source:* Rosstat, *Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The primary socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume].* (Moskva: Rosstat, 2006).

## 2.3 Demographic changes and trends<sup>7</sup>

The total population of seven North Caucasian republics comprises 6.6 million people (see Table 1). Dagestan and Chechnya account for the biggest population among the Northern Caucasus republics, 2.6 million and 1.1 million respectively. The populations of these two republics comprise one third of the population residing in all seven republics. Nearly one million people live in Kabardino-Balkaria. Smaller and practically equal populations reside in Adygheya, Karachai-Cherkessiya, and Ingushetiya.<sup>8</sup> The last Census (2002) indicated a population growth in Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Dagestan and Karachaevo–Cherkessia, despite the mass outflow of population during the Chechnya wars. Some scientists dispute this data, citing inappropriate data collection processes.<sup>9</sup> Adygheya, however, shares more similarities with the Krasnodar region, where the population growth has been stagnant due to the low fertility and high mortality rates typical for most of the regions of the Russian Federation. While all of the Northern Caucasus republics have experienced population growth until the 2000s, the situation is changing. For example, population growth is still evident in Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetiya; however, the natural increase is complemented by the influx of Chechen refugees in Ingushetiya whose presence is a heavy burden for the republic. However, the other republics have experienced a population decrease due to the migration outflow.

Prior to the 1990s, population increases due to birth were typical across the Northern Caucasus republics, resulting in a high proportion of children and youth in these republics. The proportion of children and youth (newborns to 17 year olds) in the total population fluctuates between a high of 41.4% in Ingushetiya, 39.3% in Chechnya, and 35.4% in Dagestan, to a low of 17.7% in Adygheya, 24.8% Karachai-Cherkessiya and Ossetia-Alania, and 27.6% in Kabardino-Balkaria.<sup>10</sup> The proportion of the dependent population in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetiya is double Russia's average,<sup>11</sup> which explains an exceptionally high demographic burden on the working age population in these North Caucasian republics (see Tables 1 & 2). Combined with an unfavorable socioeconomic situation, such a large number of dependent people can contribute to the growth of poverty in the Northern Caucasus republics and put more children at risk of limited education opportunities.

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<sup>7</sup> *There are many criticisms of the accuracy of the Russian statistical information published in the official sources. Its data often contradicts information from independent surveys and studies, such as data on the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP). Nevertheless, census data can be compared with the statistical data gathered in the republics to understand socioeconomic differences that exist in these republics. Such comparisons can be verified with materials from other sources, especially references to information gathered by international organizations.*

<sup>8</sup> *Generally, all statistical information on socioeconomic indices on Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Ossetia-Alania and Dagestan should be checked for accuracy, because statistical data collection mechanisms in many regions were destroyed or seriously damaged during military operations.*

<sup>9</sup> *Protopopov. A., Absolutely non-Olympic principle, Expert, 26 (2007): 9-15.*

<sup>10</sup> *Rosstat, Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik.*

<sup>11</sup> *For normal economic performance, three working-age persons must provide for a single dependent person. Therefore, dependent people must comprise approximately 30% of the population. For Russia as a whole, this proportion is about 50%, while it is much higher in the Northern Caucasus republics, comprising nearly one dependent person per one working age person.*

## 2.4. Multiethnicity and its challenges to education opportunities

The Northern Caucasus republics are the most multiethnic region of Russia, providing home to more than 70 ethnic groups. In the history of their coexistence, some of these groups at different times experienced ethnic tensions. The historical memory often (for example, as in case of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict) is the cause for the inter-ethnic tensions. Many conflicts originated in the 19th century and gained greater intensity after the deportations carried out by Stalin when thousands of people from the Northern Caucasus were involuntarily relocated to Siberia and Central Asia. Some of these conflicts persist to the present day and cause bloody events like the widely known conflicts in the Prigorodnyi district of North Ossetia in the 1990s, the Beslan tragedy in the Ossetian school in 2004, and cases of Russian teachers and their families being killed in Ingushetiya in the summer of 2007. Such eruptions of violence undermine peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups and create problems for the education process.

Table 3 highlights several important trends occurring within the indigenous ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus republics. First, the indigenous population continues to grow despite the overall population decrease in some republics, which is likely to be partially caused by the out-migration of the Russian-speaking population from the Northern Caucasus republics. Second, there is an increase of ethnic homogeneity and ethnic concentration in most of the Northern Caucasus republics (with the exception of Chechniya) and “squeezing” out of some ethnic minority groups in several republics of the Northern Caucasus republics (see Table 3).<sup>12</sup> The rapid increase of ethnic homogeneity across the region raises some concerns. On the one hand, this may alleviate inter-ethnic tensions as some minority ethnic groups may feel pressured to leave by titular ethnic groups. On the other hand, ethnic concentration of indigenous populations may have adverse effects on the acquisition of Russian language skills among titular ethnicities, hindering their opportunities to pursue higher education studies anywhere in the Russian Federation.

## 2.5. Conflicts and its impact on education development

The collapse of the Soviet Union has heightened ethnic tensions and resulted in ethnic conflicts across the Northern Caucasus region. Perhaps the most difficult situation is in Chechnya. The resurgence of Chechen nationalism in the 1990s was accompanied by a resurgence of Islam. Political and military violence began to dominate all Chechen affairs. Annually, tens and even hundreds of people were killed by armored rebels. Military conflicts from 1994-1996, and again in 1999, seriously damaged the economic infrastructure and disrupted both agricultural and industrial activity. One of Russia’s petroleum pipelines that crossed Chechnya provided the republic with transit fees from Caspian hydrocarbons which was one of the major sources of revenue. Moreover, all three petroleum refineries in the republic were

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<sup>12</sup> *Chechens present the only exception, because they were forced to migrate during the wars in previous decade.*

destroyed during the 1994-1996 conflict. In mid-1999, the Chechen section of a petroleum pipeline from Baku (Azerbaijan) to Novorossiisk, was closed, owing to the lack of security in the region.

**Table 3.**  
*Changes in the population of selected ethnic groups  
in the North Caucasian republics.*

NCR and primary native ethnic groups	Index of ethnic homogeneity, %/ Index of ethnic concentration, %				Increase of ethnic group, %		Level of urbanization of ethnic group, %	
	1926	1959	1989	2002	1959-1989	1989-2002	1959	2002
<b>Adygheya</b>								
Adyges	45	23/84	22/78	24,2/84	56	4,9	9	46,7
<b>Dagestan</b>								
Avars	18/99	23/96	28/91	29,4/93	118	49,6	9,4	36,6
Dargins	14/100	14/97	16/79	16,5/83	132	44,5	13	33,8
Kumyks	11/93	11/91	13/84	14,2/80	109	52,3	33,4	47,1
Lezgins	11/97	10/95	11/79	13,1/89	125	60,3	11,2	46,8
Laks	5/99	5/92	5/86	5,4/89	82	48,1	25,7	70,1
<b>Ingushetiya</b>								
Ingush*	18/97	7/87	13/76	77,3/86	285	92,1	8,7	45,2
<i>Kabardino-Balkaria</i>								
Kabardins	60/88	45/95	48/94	55,3/96	92	34,7	12	46,4
Balkars	16/100	8/97	9/90	11,6/97	122	38,5	13,8	47,6
<b>Karachai -Cherkessia</b>								
Karachais	53/95	24/96	31/86	38,5/88	113	28	7	38,2
Cherkess	3/78	9/83	10/79	11,3/82	74	19,6	6	37,3
<b>North Ossetia</b>								
Osetiyans	84/82	48/87	53/83	62,7/87	62	28,1	31,8	64,6
<b>Chechnya</b>								
Chechens*	76/91	34/93	58/82	93,5/76	244	51,3	9,1	36,9

\*Until 2002, data was calculated for the combined territory of the Chechen-Ingushetiya republic.

*Source:* Trifonova, Z., *Dinamika titylnih narodov Rossii.* [The dynamics of titular nationalities of Russia]. *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta* [News of the Moscow University], 4 (2007): pp.45-57.

The situation in Dagestan also became more complicated, especially because from the late 1990s the republic has experienced a steady growth of support for Islamist groups. Aided by local militant Islamists, Chechen militants invaded Dagestan in August-September 1999; an explosion in Buinaksk, outside facilities used to accommodate federal troops, killed about 60 people. Subsequently, a number of explosions in Dagestan were attributed to supporters of Chechen separatism, including a bombing on May 9, 2002 in Kaspijsk, when 45 people were killed. Relations with Chechnya were further strained after 11 villagers were abducted during a “cleansing” operation in Borozdinovskaya. The situation has remained unstable until now, with frequent military outbreaks from both sides. Every month the media reports new cases of terrorist acts, killings, or hatred cases.



In North Ossetia-Alania, the tragedy of Beslan has become known worldwide. On the first day of school (September 1, 2004), approximately 30 militants seized control of a local school, taking at least 1,100 students, parents, and teachers hostage. Following a series of explosions on September 3, federal special forces stormed the school. Official figures claimed that some 331 hostages were killed, including 186 children, although some independent estimates placed the number of fatalities at closer to 600.

Many international and Russian scholars are pessimistic about the future of political, economic, and social development of the North Caucasus republics, noting a strong likelihood for prolonged ethnic tensions in the region. Using an evaluation scale of conflict possibilities in the Northern Caucasus, experts from the Russian Academy of Science<sup>13</sup> suggest that three of the Northern Caucasus republics (Dagestan, Ingushetiya, and Chechnya) continue to be the area of “hot conflicts,” scoring “4” on a five score scale, with “5” representing the “hot” conflicts and “0” representing latent hidden tensions. Of all Northern Caucasus republics, only Adygheya is rated the lowest, while the situation in North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachai-Cherkessiya republics scored “3” with a trend of gradually decreasing number of ethnic conflicts. Some of the factors underlying ethnic conflicts in the region include deteriorating economic conditions, ineffective local governance, consolidation of clans, human rights violations, unabated corruption, resurgence of radical Islam, the growth of migration, and many others (see Table 4). Undoubtedly, these factors underline some of the ethnic tensions in the region and they are likely to remain unresolved in the near future.

To summarize, continued ethnic tensions and conflicts have become features of every day life in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, and occasionally in other republics, negatively affecting all society and especially children. For example, surveys carried out in 2002 and 2004 by specialists of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Moscow Scientific Research Institute of Psychology have demonstrated that the incidence of psychotic disorders and disturbances among the Chechen population was around 86% in 2002 and 75% in 2004. More than 30% of the population suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome.<sup>14</sup> Disturbance of social functioning prevails amongst teenagers because 28% of them (i.e. among adolescents examined in 2004) had psychologically traumatic experiences related to threats on their lives, whereas in 2002, the corresponding figure was 65%. Both experts and teachers note that rehabilitation programs are inadequate for the situation in Chechnya and a shortage of competent pedagogues-psychologists exists. Similarly, studies performed by UNICEF demonstrated that a great number of children and their parents need psychological rehabilitation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dmitriev, A.V., *False impression of danger. Rossiiskaya gazeta* (September 8, 2006); Arksentiev, G., Gritsenko, A., Dmitriev, “*Studies of regional conflicts: Experts’ opinion*,” ed. Gorsbkov (Moscow: ‘Alfa-M,’ 2007): 114.

<sup>14</sup> K.A. Idrisov, V. N.Krasnov, *Psychiatric health of Chechen Republic Population Under Enduring State of Emergency. Disturbances.* (Moscow: WHO, Scientific Research Institute of psychiatry, the RF Ministry of public health. Grozny, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> [www.unicef.org/infobycountry](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry)

**Table 4.**  
*The primary factors affecting political stability in the Northern Caucasus republics (a summary of different sources).*

Factors explaining potential conflicts (by experts of the Southern Federal Okrug), 2007 <sup>16</sup>	Factors explaining ethno-political instability (by Avksentiev, 2004) <sup>17</sup>	Issues affecting future stability and chances for sustainable development (by Neil J. Melvin, 2007) <sup>18</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deteriorating economic situation in previous years, with no prospects of improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nation building processes based on ethnicity principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unresolved national territorial issues</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local government authorities ignore people's needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity crisis based on the disappearance of the Soviet identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resurgence of Islam and Islamism</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human rights violations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geopolitical transformation (changes in influential actors)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unabated growth of corruption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deteriorating socio-economic conditions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent use of violence as a tool for conflict resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration</li> </ul>	

Undoubtedly, the combination of devastating ethnic tensions and conflicts, gloomy economic development prospects, corruption, ineffective governance, and demographic changes, negatively affects the entire population of the Northern Caucasus republics, especially children and youth who require urgent assistance. The issues of declining access to education in general and the quality of education in particular are especially urgent as they may have irreversible impact on generations of young people, further hindering socioeconomic development, political stability, and social cohesion of the Northern Caucasus republics.

<sup>16</sup> Avksentiev, V., Gritsenko, G., Dmitriev, A.V., *Studies of regional conflicts: Experts' opinion*, in ed. M. Gorskov. (Moscow: Alfa-M, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Avksentiev V., *Factori etnopoliticheskoj nestabilnosti v Severokavkazskom regione Etnicheskie problemi sovremennosti* [Factors of ethno-political instability in the Northern Caucasus region: Ethnic problems of modernity]. (Stavropol, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Melvin, N. J., *Building Stabilities in the Northern Caucasus: Way Forward for Russia and the European Union* [Stockholm International Research Peace Institute policy paper]. (Stockholm: SIRPI, 2007).



### 3 – EDUCATION AT RISK: EXAMINING THE ISSUES OF ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

During the Soviet period, the Northern Caucasus republics had some of the lowest education indicators compared to other Soviet republics. According to the 1989 census data, the average number of people with higher education was around 68 per thousand among the Avars, 61 among the Dargins, 60 among the Ingush, and 45 among Chechens, compared to an average of 113 per thousand in the Russian Federation.<sup>19</sup> After more than 15 years of civil unrest, militant activities, and economic decline, some scholars compare the education level of the Northern Caucasus republics to that of 1957.<sup>20</sup> In 2005, the Northern Caucasus republics had some of the lowest per capita spending in education in the Russian Federation. For example, Chechnya's per capita funding on education measured only one fourth of Russia's average, and in Ingushetiya and North Ossetia it barely reached one half of Russia's average in 2005 (see Table 5). A lack of financial resources, further aggravated by the consequences of the prolonged political instability, military conflicts, and ethnic tensions, has created multiple adverse effects on education in the Northern Caucasus republics. Of a myriad of education problems affecting education access and quality, this study will discuss the following issues in more detail: (1) deteriorating school infrastructure, (2) lack of opportunities for preschool education, (3) insufficient Russian native/ethnic language skills, (4) lack of qualified teachers, (5) widespread corruption, and (6) a lack of parental support and involvement in education.

Analysis of data from focus groups and structured interviews with education experts has revealed that the Northern Caucasus republics share many commonalities in terms of education access and quality. However, the nature and intensity of some of the problems differs by specific republics. The sections below will attempt to document the differences in the nature and intensity of education-related problems in different republics of the Northern Caucasus based both on the existing quantitative data (statistical information gathered by the state and international organizations) and qualitative data (in-depth focus groups and interviews conducted for this research).

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<sup>19</sup> Volkov Y.A. Sybetto A.I. Volkov A.Y., *Obrazovanie i intellektualnii potentsial Russii: Statistika sotsiologicheskii monitoring besproizvodstva*. [Education and intellectual potential of Russia: Sociological monitoring] (Moscow-St. Petersburg, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Onkhadov, M., "Itogi natsionalnoi politiki sovetskogo perioda I problemi sovremennoi Chechni," in *Chechnia: Ot Konflikta k Stabilnosti (Problemi rekonstruktsii)*. [Chechnya: From conflict to stability (Problems of reconstruction), eds. D. Gakaev & A. Yandarov (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAS, 2001)].

**Table 5.**  
*The Primary Education Indices of the Northern Caucasus  
Republics and the Russian Federation, 2005.*

% of children in preschool	% of children studying in one school shift	Number of vocational training institutions	Number of students in vocational training institutions (thousands)	Number of state and municipal secondary special institutions	Number of students in municipal secondary special institutions (thousands)	Number of higher education institutions	Number of students in higher education (thousands)	Per capita funding (rubles)*	
								Secondary education	Higher education
<b>Russia</b>									
57,3	85,0	3392	1509,4	2688	2473,0	1068	7064,6	5843	11958
<b>Southern Federal Okrug (SFO)</b>									
41,5	77,1	395	191,7	306	346,3	149	930,9	-	-
<b>Adygea</b>									
50,0	80,9	9	4,2	5	6,3	1	15,6		
<b>Dagestan</b>									
26,1	67,3	27	10,3	28	25,1	15	112,2	3005	4450
<b>Ingushetiya</b>									
6,6	61,6	4	1,7	4	2,3	3	10,2	2742	4526
<b>Kabardino-Balkaria</b>									
48,9	82,2	13	13,4	-	9,7	4	28,9	-	6922
<b>Karachai-Cherkessiya</b>									
41,1	81,1	8	4,0	7	5,7	2	16,2	-	-
<b>North Osetia-Alania</b>									
52,5	75,4	16	5,7	13	10,0	11	35,0	2585	6520
<b>Chechnya</b>									
10,0*	54,1	15	8,3	7	9,8	3	25,4	1526	-

\* Data on preschool enrolment from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation. 2006. Inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus. [Online]. Available: [www.ocha.ru/](http://www.ocha.ru/).

\*\*Data on per capita funding in education from Agranovich et al., Agranovich, M. et al., *Youth development report: Condition of Russian youth*. (Paris, France and Eschborn, Germany: UNESCO and GTZ, 2005).

**Source:** Rosstat, *Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The primary socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume]*. (Moskva: Rosstat, 2006).

### 3.1. Overcrowding and deterioration of school infrastructure

Given the demographic growth in the Northern Caucasus, school overcrowding has become a major problem in the region. In 2006, the total number of school age children in the Northern Caucasus was about 1022.9 thousand (approximately 15% of the total population) attending 3,191 schools (see Table 6). The proportion of children attending school in one shift has fluctuated around the Russian average (85%), with the exception of Chechnya, Ingushetiya, and Dagestan where the proportion of students studying in one shift is substantially lower (54.1%, 61.6%, and 67.3% respectively). It is not surprising, because the share of children in these republics is the highest in Russia, while the number of schools in Chechnya and Ingushetiya has not increased since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Synzhenskij and Carabylak regions of Ingushetiya (where the majority of refugees are concentrated) face some of the most severe problems with school overcrowding. Although the government of Ingushetiya funds the construction of up to four new schools annually, this does not seem enough to accommodate all students.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, most republics have experienced a visible deterioration of education infrastructure due to a lack of financial support to schools and non-compliance with sanitary norms and safety measures. In some regions and towns, children have to study in buildings that have exceeded their operational lifetime. The situation is especially problematic in the mountainous rural areas of Dagestan where 389 primary schools are located. Across the region, most classrooms are poorly equipped and many schools do not have gyms, laboratories, libraries, or cafeterias. In Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Dagestan, and North Ossetia, the availability of textbooks, stationary, school furniture, and other educational materials also remains insufficient.<sup>21</sup>

While most schools in the Northern Caucasus face the issue of overcrowding and deteriorating school infrastructure, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, and Chechnya also deal with the gruesome reality of destroyed and/or damaged school facilities as a result of military conflicts. For example, a UNICEF survey on the physical state of schools and kindergartens in Chechnya highlights that many schools located in remote and mountainous areas remain severely damaged or dilapidated, while classes are often organized on the basis of 2 or, in the case of at least 77 schools, even 3 shifts per day.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, these republics deal with ongoing setbacks of power, heating, and water, which have irreversible adverse effects on both the access to and quality of education for all children.

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<sup>21</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, *Inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus*, <http://www.ocha.ru/> (2006).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 6.***The Primary Population and Education Characteristics of the Northern Caucasus Republics, 2005.*

	<b>Total population (thousands)</b>	<b>Number of population under the working age</b>	<b>% of population under the working age</b>	<b>% of population 0–17 years old</b>	<b>Number of students (thousands)</b>	<b>Number of schools</b>
<b>Northern Caucasus Republics (total)</b>	<b>6 645.1</b>	<b>1 857.4</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>1022.9</b>	<b>3191</b>
Adygea	447. 1	41.6	17.7	21.6	48.0	175
Dagestan	2 576. 5	792.3	30.7	35.4	432.5	1687
Ingushetiya	467. 3	171.3	36.7	41.1	64.9	115
Kabardino-Balkaria	901. 5	214.1	23.7	27.6	115.6	343
Karachay-Cherkessia	439. 5	100.0	22.7	26.5	55.7	192
North Ossetia-Alania	710. 3	151.7	21.3	24.8	91.4	219
Chechnya	1 103. 7	386.4	35.0	39.3	214.8	460

*Source:* Rosstat, *Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The primary socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume]. (Moskva: Rosstat, 2006).*

### 3.2. Lack of opportunities for preschool education

Preschool education remains of particular concern in most of the Northern Caucasus republics. In Chechnya and Ingushetiya, for example, only 10% of all children between the ages of three and six attend preschools, while approximately 30% of children attend preschools in Dagestan (see Table 5).<sup>23</sup> In some Northern Caucasus republics (for example, Ingushetiya), home schooling has become preferable since the system of preschool education has practically ceased to exist.

Given that most Northern Caucasus republics are located in rural and mountainous areas, many large families in the countryside traditionally use older children as babysitters for younger kids. Many experts interviewed for this study highlighted the adverse affects of this tradition both on older and younger children. For older children, this may mean frequent school absences and reduced time dedicated to homework, while younger children lack the adequate preparation for school and do not acquire the basic Russian language skills necessary for elementary education in state-funded schools. Furthermore, some experts observed that formal preschools provide better nutrition for children enrolled in preschools, thus having a positive effect on children's health and growth. This is not always the case with children growing up in large families in rural areas, where widespread poverty puts many children at risk of chronic malnutrition, leading to physical weakness and poor health, often undermining their chances of attending elementary schools because of health concerns. Undoubtedly, the cognitive, interpersonal, and physical development of children who do not benefit from preschool education opportunities is generally hampered, which often leads to lower achievement in school.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Importantly, some governments of the Northern Caucasus republics have recognized the importance and urgency of preschool education. Thus, the government of Karachayevo-Cherkessia announced the year 2007 as the “year of pre-schoolers,” putting education of preschool-aged children on the top of education policy agenda.<sup>25</sup> However, it remains unclear whether these declaratory reforms would actually result in expanded preschool education opportunities for all children of the Northern Caucasus republics.

### 3.3. Insufficient Russian native/ethnic language skills

One of the biggest problems for children in rural and mountainous areas is the issue of language instruction. Officially, Russian is the main language of instruction in all Northern Caucasus republics, allocating 3-4 academic hours per week to native languages in the official school curriculum. The problem is that many Russian language teachers left the region as a result of the military conflict outbreaks, political instability, and ethnic hatred incidents against Russian teachers.<sup>26</sup> The outflow of many ethnic Russian teachers to the predominantly Russian ethnic regions has left schools without qualified education professionals, and this situation is particularly aggravated in rural areas. Teachers of various ethnic groups still work in urban settlements, while teachers in the rural areas represent almost exclusively the indigenous ethnic groups of their specific geographic area. Most of these teachers are not native Russian language speakers who face difficulties teaching school subjects in the Russian language. Ironically, these teachers have to teach students who often have no or limited Russian language skills. In these complex circumstances, the rural/urban divide in the quality of education becomes especially apparent.

Furthermore, a new generation of youth in the Northern Caucasus is coming of age without a systematic knowledge of their mother tongue. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, pre-service education of teachers of native/mother languages has been substantially reduced. In Chechnya, for example, the number of philology students at the state university was reduced from 75 students per year in the late 1980s to 15 students per year in 1998.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, there has been a decrease of the number of publications in national languages, further hindering opportunities for education in native/mother tongue for students in the Northern Caucasus republics. As a result, the post-Soviet generation of children and youth in the Northern Caucasus is growing up without adequate knowledge of both their native/mother tongue and the Russian language.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.ng.ru/issues/?action=topic&toid=4469>

<sup>26</sup> *During the Soviet period, many school teachers (especially teachers of Russian language and literature) were usually members of Slavic groups (including Russians, Ukrainians) as well as Armenians.*

<sup>27</sup> *Mizherikov, V., “Sovremennoe sostoianie obrazovaniia Chechenskoi respublikii,” in Chechnia: Ot Konfliktia k Stabilitnosti (Problemi rekonstryktsii). [Chechnya: From conflict to stability (Problems of reconstruction), eds. D. Gakaev & A. Yandarov (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAS, 2001).*



### 3.4. Lack of qualified teachers

The difficulties of the transition period have affected teachers as a professional group. On the one hand, many teachers lack motivation for their work because of low salaries, high teaching loads, and large classes, as well as a general lack of equipment, school textbooks, and teaching manuals in schools. Teachers do not see the payoff for participating in professional development courses or introducing innovative teaching/learning approaches in their classrooms. On the other hand, professional development opportunities have practically ceased to exist in most of the Northern Caucasus Republics. While all teachers were required to participate in professional development activities once every five years during the Soviet period, such requirements can no longer be met due to financial restrictions. As a result, most teachers are left without any opportunities for professional development and interaction with their colleagues. Teachers in capital cities and urban areas are in a slightly more favorable situation, because they have better access to professional literature and other relevant information. In rural areas, however, teachers rely on outdated textbooks and suffer from ongoing professional isolation, which has serious consequences for the overall quality of education. As one of the interviewed teachers explained:

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*There are two types of people who decide to work in schools as teachers. They are either dedicated fanatics whose numbers are dwindling each year... or those who cannot find any other job. It is necessary to improve the social status of a teacher, to make this job prestigious, and to change the attitude of society towards school education.*

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### 3.5. Widespread corruption in education

Focus groups and interviews with school teachers revealed that corruption is perceived to be among the most serious problems in the education systems of the Northern Caucasus republics. Teachers as a professional group insist that a combination of poverty, unemployment, and commercialization of education have created fertile space for corrupt practices, especially as students prepare for entrance to higher education. In particular, most teachers perceive entrance to higher education as a hallmark of quality education. The existing gap between higher education entrance requirements and the school curriculum prohibits the majority of students from entering higher education institutions without the help of private tutors or bribes. Many parents are unable to pay for the services of private tutors, while bribery and corruption in the higher education sphere put a seal on the situation and leave children from poor families behind.

Corruption in education in the Northern Caucasus mirrors national trends in the Russian Federation, yet it surpasses them in terms of scale and depth.<sup>28</sup> Interviewed teachers regularly mentioned gifts and informal payments to schools among the major costs of attending schools. Importantly, the transition from secondary schools to higher education institutions was consistently referred to as the most fertile for corruption. In fact, many teachers and university professors openly admitted that higher education entrance depended not on students' knowledge, but on their family connections and financial status. As a result, higher education institutions are often flooded by unqualified students from economically better-off families, while many gifted students from poorer families have limited or no access to higher education institutions. For example, one professor explained:

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*We use standardized testing examinations in the Russian language to admit students to many higher education programs. Many students from the Northern Caucasus republics come with the highest scores in the Russian language examination, but we later realize that they can barely speak Russian.*

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### **3.6. Lack of parental support and involvement in education**

The consequences of war, prolonged ethnic tensions, and high unemployment rates have resulted in widespread post-conflict apathy among parents. They need to survive and search for food for their families, and, consequently, have little time for their children. A combination of low education levels among parents themselves and the realization that education may not necessarily secure employment opportunities in the post-Soviet economy has led to a situation where parents and children do not consider education to be a valuable asset. An example of the attitudes of some parents from Chechnya deserves particular attention. According to psychologists who organized focus groups and have a deep knowledge of the region, Vainakh (Chechen) cultural traditions place attention not on children but on adult males who are the main family bread winners. As a result, many Chechen parents do not pay enough attention to the problems of education of their children and do not demonstrate much interest in education in general. Without the appropriate support at home, however, it is difficult for children from disadvantaged and marginalized backgrounds to succeed in the education system.

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<sup>28</sup> World Bank, *Youth in the Northern Caucasus: From risk to opportunity*. (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006): 32.



## 4 – CHILDREN AT RISK IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups has revealed that there are several distinct groups of children-at-risk across the Northern Caucasus republics. These groups include (1) children from low-income and poor families, (2) victims of military conflicts and ethnic tensions, (3) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), (4) children with disabilities and health problems, and (5) children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families.

### 4.1. Children from low-income and poor families

Poverty is one of the main factors affecting education access and quality in the Northern Caucasus. Apart from the post-Soviet economic downturn (closing of factories, collective farms, mines, and other objects), the Northern Caucasus has also experienced the effects of “conflict-induced poverty.” According to the Vulnerability Needs Assessment conducted in early 2005, over half of the resident population in the central districts of Chechnya lives in poverty.<sup>29</sup> Approximately eight thousand children in Chechnya live in families with an average per capita income below the minimum cost of living. Since 2001, the average monthly child benefit allowance in Chechnya has been 70 roubles (US\$2.90) for a child from a two-parent family and 140 roubles (US\$5.80) per child from a single parent family. Such a meager child benefit allowance is clearly insufficient for monthly food, notwithstanding other key expenses necessary for well-being and the education of young children.

While other areas of the North Caucasus republics have not suffered wide-scale destruction associated with military hostilities such as in Chechnya, they have been in a prolonged state of economic stagnation. According to an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) study, 44% of the urban population and 66% of people living in rural areas in Dagestan are poor, with 28% of Ingushetia’s urban and 48% of its rural residents living under the poverty line.<sup>30</sup> This means that young people in these three republics face poor prospects for education, personal development, and future employment because of the financial constraints faced by their families.

Interviews with teachers and education experts revealed that poverty is also an issue in other republics. For example, teachers in Kabardino-Balkaria, Adyghea, and Karachai-Cherkessiya reported that children from rural areas may not have access to quality education because their parents are unable to buy school supplies, and they

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<sup>29</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, *Inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

may not have time to help their children with homework. In Kabardino-Balkaria, for example, approximately 50% of adults are unemployed (both in urban and rural areas) and those who are employed receive very low wages. Many parents are forced to travel and/or migrate to other cities in search of employment and, therefore, do not have the opportunity to provide their children with the necessary support in school. Children in rural areas are more vulnerable from the very beginning of the education process, because they come to schools unprepared due to a lack of preschool opportunities in the countryside and many miss school on a regular basis because they engage in various income generation activities in order to help their families survive. As one of the teachers explained:

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*Because of the low standard of living in large families, both parents and older children must work in order to feed the family, while younger children are responsible for housework and care of their younger siblings. Constant psychological stress and the urgency of making ends meet do not allow these children to study normally.*

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## 4.2. Victims of military conflicts and ethnic tensions

Given the consequences of military activities over the last decade, Chechnya has one very specific group of children-at-risk, that is children who are victims of military hostilities. Some of these children suffer psychological and physical traumas associated with war experiences. In Chechnya, for example, the total number of children in need of rehabilitation is 19,435.<sup>31</sup> Another group consists of children who dropped out from school due to military hostilities. This group is rather large and consists primarily of children living in Grozny and rural areas where most military hostilities occurred in the second half of the 1990s. Given that full-scale hostilities of various intensity were carried out in Chechnya from 1994 to 2000, all school age children who should have attended school during this period fall into this risk group. According to our estimates, this group could be as large as 200,000 children.<sup>32</sup> Many of these children do not have basic education skills and need a special curriculum combining professional training and formal instruction. One mother described the dire education experience of her son who is now an unemployed 23 year old:

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<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Labor and Social Development, Chechen Republic Government, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> This number was calculated based on the number of children born in the countryside from 1987 to 1994, who belonged to a demographic cohort of 10-14 year olds at the time of military hostilities (approximately 13 600 persons). In addition, all children who lived in Grozny city (constituting approximately 30% of all residents of Grozny) belong to the risk group, since schools and other education facilities were completely destroyed during military hostilities. Combined, children from rural areas and Grozny constitute approximately 200,000 children.

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*What education exactly are we talking about? My son finished three grades before the first war<sup>33</sup> in Grozny and two more grades after the first war. A total of five grades. I did not let him attend school because of bombing threats. I myself taught him grammar. He knows basic mathematics and formulas. But, he has no knowledge of chemistry and physics. We left Chechnya after the second war.*

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In addition to military conflicts, educational opportunities can also be disrupted by ongoing ethnic tensions in other parts of the Northern Caucasus republics. For example, one of the focus groups conducted for this study was held in a village of North Ossetia-Alania and reflected the complex problems of the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. It is a half -Ingush and half-Ossetian village located in the Prigorodnyi district of North Ossetia-Alania, and it is notorious for its bloody fights and Ingush migration to Ingushetiya. While many Ingush families left the village, some of them remained. Their children attend a special school for Ingush students only, while the rest of the students attend a North-Ossetian school. Ethnic mixing is not encouraged and can be dangerous. Ingush children have to rely on special bus transportation, which takes them through the Ossetian part of the village to their school. If a child misses the school bus, she cannot get to school on her own because of security concerns. Given that children are brought to school for a limited period of time daily, the school cannot organize any extra curricula activities and children miss out on many education experiences. Furthermore, children grow up in the constant fear of ethnic tensions and clashes, which has adverse effects on their psychological well-being and upbringing.

### **4.3. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)**

There are no official statistics on the total number of refugees and IDPs in the Northern Caucasus republics, and the existing data fluctuates between 78,000 and 112,000 (see Table 7). Official registration is impeded by the Russian authorities' unwillingness to recognize refugee status and grant it to all people in need. As a result, many refugees and IDPs stay with their relatives without official registration, fearing that they may be sent back to their home republics. According to our estimates,<sup>34</sup> the number of refugee and IDP children could be from 11,700-16,800. The number of refugee and IDP children in Ingushetiya is estimated to be around 37.5% of the total number of children.<sup>35</sup> Refugees and IDPs in rural areas experience some of the highest rates of poverty. For example, Dagestan has the highest levels of poverty among IDPs, with 56% in urban areas and 72% in rural areas being classified

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<sup>33</sup> *In Russia the government does not use word "War" with regard to the Chechen conflict, but call it "anti militias operations." The locals call it the "first and second Chechen war."*

<sup>34</sup> *This calculation was done based on the demographic structure of the local population of the republics affected by conflicts. According to the census we estimate the share of children of different age groups.*

<sup>35</sup> *Census 2002 Goskomstat, Russia.*

as very poor, compared with 52% and 49% respectively for IDPs in Chechnya.<sup>36</sup> Most of refugees and IDPs survive by relying on debt, social welfare, remittances from relatives, humanitarian assistance, and subsistence farming to meet their basic needs.

**Table 7.**  
*The Number of Refugees and IDPs in the North Caucasian republics, 2006.*

Republics	Estimated Number of Refugees and IDPs
Republic of Chechnya	47,675 (NRC) – 60,100(Government)
Republic of Dagestan	6,017 (DRC) – 8,526 (UNHCR)
Republic of Ingushetiya	23,306 (DRC) – 42,678 (NRC)
Republic of Ossetia-Alania	1,200 (Memorial)
<b>Total</b>	<b>78,198 -112,504</b>

*Notes:* NRC – Norwegian Refugee Council; DRC –Danish Refugee Council

*Sources:* [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

Given the financial constraints faced by their families, many refugee and IDP children have limited access to education. Some parents have insufficient funds for school supplies; others do not allow their children to attend remote schools due to security concerns. More alarmingly, many IDP children in temporary settlements (i.e. refugee camps) continue to rely on education services provided by international organizations and NGOs. In Ingushetiya, for example, the number of IDP children attending schools in temporary settlements reached over 1,500 in 2006.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.4. Children with disabilities and health problems

Similar to other former Soviet republics, the Northern Caucasus must face the legacy of the institutionalization of children with disabilities. In particular, children with disabilities were educated separately from children in mainstream schools, if at all. Children with disabilities largely grew up in state institutions (internats) or attended special schools for such children with little prospect of employment, marriage, and life fulfilment. All of the common prejudices about disabilities continue to exist today and people with disabilities remain victims their whole lives, lacking access to proper health care and education, as well as the opportunity for rehabilitation.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, *Inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus*, p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF Humanitarian Action, *North Caucasus donor update*, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/NC\\_Final\\_DU\\_13Jul06.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/NC_Final_DU_13Jul06.pdf) (2006).

<sup>38</sup> Naughton, C., *Handicap International's Work with Disabled People in the North Caucasus*. *Disability World*, 19, [http://www.disabilityworld.org/06-08\\_03/development/chechnya.shtml](http://www.disabilityworld.org/06-08_03/development/chechnya.shtml) (2003).

The data on the proportion of children with disabilities varies depending on sources. In particular, official state estimates are that there are approximately 20,000 children with various disabilities in Chechnya and over 3,000 in Ingushetia.<sup>39</sup> Of all children with disabilities in Chechnya, only 3,286 have access to mainstream schools, 750 attend special schools/institutions, and 483 receive home schooling. The remaining children are confined to their homes without any opportunities to learn. The situation in Ingushetiya is similarly gloomy. Of all disabled children, only 280 attend mainstream or special schools and 170 receive home schooling.<sup>40</sup> School surveys conducted for this study<sup>41</sup> indicated that the proportion of children with disabilities does not exceed 3-5% of the total child population in Karachai-Cherkessiya, Adygheya, and Kabardino-Balkaria. In Chechnya, Ossetia-Alania, and Dagestan, however, this proportion reached 10% and occasionally 20% in some schools. According to official data, Chechnya has the largest number of children with disabilities. Undoubtedly, the issue of mainstreaming children with disabilities into the education system deserves greater attention. Schools lack special education materials, teachers and psychologists have no appropriate professional training, and most of the republics lack inclusive policies in line with international standards.

#### **4.5. Children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families**

The results of the focus groups and interviews conducted for this study indicated that children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families constitute a fairly large group in the Northern Caucasus, ranging from 10% to 40% depending on the specific republic. This group consists of children from families with single parents, alcoholics, and drug addicts. Many of these children have been abandoned due to substance abuse by family members (reported by interviewed teachers and experts in all republics) or migration of parents in search of better employment (reported by teachers and experts in Karachai–Cherkessia). In Chechnya, many children were orphaned during the military conflicts and are now surviving on their own or live with relatives. Of the total number of children in need of rehabilitation (19,435) in Chechnya, 1,529 children were orphans, and 8,924 children were abandoned and/or lacked parental care.<sup>42</sup> Assistance has been provided for only 420 children, leaving the majority of children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families without any financial or psychological support.

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<sup>39</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, *Inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus*.

<sup>40</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, *Executive summary of the inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus*. [Online].

<sup>41</sup> *We have to understand that these figures are relevant for particular schools and do not apply across the entire republic.*

<sup>42</sup> UNICEF, *A Social and psychological examination of the Chechen Republic's children who have psychological traumas due to hostilities (Stavropol, 2005)*.





## 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the intensity of education-related problems and the variety of at-risk children groups in the Northern Caucasus republics, it is imperative to develop long-term strategies for improving education opportunities for all vulnerable children in the region. These strategies should seek to combine the improvement of the general education environment of the republics with specific action plans for the most vulnerable groups of children (for example, children in rural areas, children with disabilities, and others). Such a two-prong approach has been effectively used by some international development agencies (for example, UNICEF and the Dutch Refugee Fund), leading to the improvement of educational opportunities both for children at-risk and the entire school-aged population.

- **INCREASE ACCESS TO SOCIAL AND EDUCATION INTEGRATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

It is important to provide opportunities for children to actively engage in the education process and to ensure second chances for those who may have dropped out of school for various reasons (war, poverty, disabilities, etc.)

- *To organize “early weekend educational centers” to improve school preparation for preschool age children.* These centers should be based in primary schools and used for developing basic school-readiness among preschool age children, especially the acquisition of Russian language skills. Teachers should be remunerated for this work, which will provide additional compensation for them to supplement low salaries.
- *To organize special educational and professional colleges (centers) for children who dropped out of the education system.* Such centers would provide an opportunity for children and youth to master general education curriculum, while acquiring a profession at the same time. These centers will need special equipment and professional staff.
- *To continue the implementation of rehabilitation and integration programs for children and teachers affected by war.* These programs should specifically target children and teachers primarily in the four republics (Chechnya, Dagestan, North Ossetia–Alania and Ingushetiya), which have been affected by military operations.
- *To promote the adoption and implementation of more inclusive education policies for children with disabilities.* While some efforts have been made to include children with disabilities into mainstream schools, it is important to consider various alternatives to de-institutionalization practices and ensure adequate preparation of teachers, staff, and families.

- *To increase opportunities for disadvantaged youth (for example, children from rural areas) to study in higher education institutions.* This may be achieved by restoring and promoting a “rabfak system,” a one year preliminary preparation system in the universities for workers, and/or by establishing quotas and stipends for rural children in higher education institutions.

- **TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN**

The General education environment must be improved to provide equal education opportunities for all children.

- *To support the physical rehabilitation of school facilities.* Many children continue to attend overcrowded and dilapidated school facilities, which negatively affect their education experiences.
- *To introduce a system of “Green computers” to improve access to information.*<sup>43</sup> This would provide opportunities for children even in the most remote rural areas to be exposed to new information and ideas in order to become educationally competitive.
- *To create extracurricular activities in schools,* which may include clubs, musical and art activities, mobile exhibitions, concerts, and competitions which would encourage children to demonstrate their best work.
- *Encourage extra-curricular activities between the various regions of the NCR to promote tolerance.* Extracurricular activities may help demolish the myths and stereotypes about violent conflicts and block the reproduction of new cycles of violence. This is especially important in overcoming the post-war apathy of the population.

- **PROVIDE REGULAR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS AND ACADEMICS**

The quality of education will not improve without ensuring adequate support to teachers and raising their professionalism and morale. In this context, it is important to consider the following recommendations:

- *Provide regular opportunities for in-service teacher training programs,* including seminars/workshops on modern teaching/learning methodologies, workshops aimed at sharing experiences and disseminating “best practices,” as well as sessions permitting knowledge-transfer in specific subject matter (mathematics, physics, language, etc.). These professional development programs are lacking in all republics of the Northern Caucasus and should be implemented following a more specific needs assessment in each republic.

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<sup>43</sup> For more details see: <http://laptop.org/vision/index.shtml>

- *Increase motivation of teachers* by offering “best teacher” and/or “best student” awards. Such professional incentives would raise teacher motivation and financial awards could be used for professional development of teachers such as traveling to different cities/countries for professional exchanges and conferences, visiting training centers, etc.
- *To support academic and professional development of intelligentsia from the Northern Caucasus republics by creating a department of the Caucasus study in some of the largest universities in Russia*, for example, in the University of Friendship in Moscow or other universities. The Establishment of such a study program will attract academic attention and scientific research to the issues of education in the Northern Caucasus and to bring intelligentsia from the Northern Caucasus republics to large universities for the professional study of post-war reconstruction processes.

- **INTRODUCE RUSSIAN AS A SECOND LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS**

Given that a poor knowledge of the Russian language was identified as one of the core problems hindering educational opportunities for many children (especially children in rural areas), it is necessary to take steps to address the issue by considering the following recommendations:

- *To increase the number of higher education students in the programs/ departments preparing teachers of Russian and national languages/ literatures*. This will create the necessary cadre of professional educators who will be able to effectively equip their students with the Russian language skills necessary to continue education in colleges and universities.
- *To organize professional development opportunities for school teachers in teaching methodologies for Russian as a second language of instruction*. This research has revealed that many children face difficulties studying in the Russian language because it is not their native language, and they do not have opportunities to gain language proficiency before entering public schools. Given that most teachers have never been professionally trained in teaching Russian as a second language, in-service training in this area would improve their methodological skills and contribute to the overall goal of raising the quality of education.