

Russian Federation: IDPs still face challenges related to their displacement

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In Chechnya, armed violence and two rounds of conflict between separatists and government forces, first between 1994 and 1996 and then again since 1999, have caused some 800,000 people to flee their homes. In North Ossetia-Alania, a briefer conflict in 1992 over Prigorodny district displaced from 35,000 to 70,000 people, mainly ethnic Ingush. Violence and human rights abuses remain rampant throughout the North Caucasus, where armed groups have continued to seek to create an Islamic state. Perpetrators enjoy impunity and people exposing these cases have been threatened, harassed and killed.

There are no authoritative figures of the number of people originally or currently displaced. However, in mid-2010 at least 55,000 people were still displaced in the North Caucasus (45,000 from Chechnya and 10,000 from North Ossetia-Alania), and an unknown number were displaced elsewhere in the Russian Federation. The total number of internally displaced people (IDPs) is probably much higher as their status and registration has progressively expired or been cancelled without an assessment of their achievement of durable solutions.

A more comprehensive approach to achieving durable solutions in Russia should include:

- provision of permanent housing to IDPs who have not yet benefited from housing support;
- facilitation of receipt or replacement of residence registration, forced migrant status and pension documents for IDPs;
- expansion of settlement options of IDPs to respect their freedom of choice of residence; and,
- regular monitoring of progress towards durable solutions for IDPs.

Response to internal displacement

The federal and republican governments continue to implement programmes that benefit the general population in the North Caucasus, including IDPs. These relate to housing, jobs, property complaints, medical and social assistance and legal counseling. In mid-2010 the federal government also adopted a new strategy to develop the North Caucasus federal district. The objective is to address poverty, unemployment and corruption with social and economic development activities. The situation of IDPs outside of the North Caucasus continues to be neglected by the government.

Most international organisations assisting IDPs are planning to phase out operations in the North Caucasus within the next few years. UNHCR has calculated it would have to invest \$155 million to provide durable solutions to IDPs and other persons of concern, assuming an 85 per cent contribution from the government and operational partners. Most of the funding (\$120 million) would go towards shelter, while the remainder (\$35 million) would fund protection activities.

Places of origin of IDPs in the Russian Federation



Settlement patterns of IDPs

Many IDPs have returned to Chechnya or North Ossetia-Alania. According to government statistics, some 255,000 IDPs returned to Chechnya from 1999 to 2009, and over 25,000 IDPs returned to North Ossetia-Alania from 1994 to 2010. In North Ossetia, about 50 per cent of returnees have gone back to their homes in Prigorodny district, while in Chechnya up to 60 per cent returned to their former homes or apartments. The rest received housing from the government, moved in with relatives or ended up living in temporary accommodation in their second or third area of displacement. The destruction

or secondary occupation of their original homes and the lack of property ownership documents were the main factors preventing their return. There has been no monitoring of the situation of these groups, or assessment of whether they have achieved durable solutions.

IDPs in Chechnya

Settlement options for IDPs wishing to live in Chechnya have been limited. Returnees are only eligible for housing or land plots in areas where they have permanent registration. In this way the government has limited settlement in Grozny and other cities. Municipal administrations are responsible for providing housing or land plots to returnees, and while returnees in Grozny have received such assistance, many in rural areas have reportedly not, due to lack of funding.

IDPs in North Ossetia-Alania

IDPs who wish to settle in North Ossetia-Alania also have limited options. Relations between Ossetians and Ingush remain tense in some areas and return is not permitted to mixed ethnic villages in Prigorodny district. To those IDPs whose villages were closed for return, the government offered land plots in Mayskoe and Novi villages in Prigorodny district. Some refused, insisting on their right to return to their homes. Local administrations may also prevent return by ruling that housing assistance cannot be used to buy or build housing in the district. The situation may change if a 2009 agreement between the Republics of Ingushetia and North Ossetia-Alania is implemented, which provides for return to all areas.

IDPs in Ingushetia

IDPs from Chechnya in Ingushetia have been repeatedly put under pressure to return. The most recent episode was in 2009, when all the remaining IDPs were de-registered from the government of Ingushetia's assistance lists. However, with no housing to return to, most IDPs continue to live in Ingushetia.

In 2010 there appeared to be a policy shift, as the federal government allocated funding for the first year of a five-year housing programme in Ingushetia for 1,555 internally displaced families from Chechnya. This is a welcome initiative for the 40 per cent of IDPs from Chechnya who wish to stay there, though only those recognised as "forced migrants" will be eligible.

There has been no pressure on IDPs from North Ossetia-Alania to leave Ingushetia, but neither have the authorities promoted their integration by allocating them housing funds. However, the government has renovated some temporary settlements where they live. About 25 per cent of IDPs from North Ossetia-Alania would prefer to remain in Ingushetia, while 70 per cent wish to return.

IDPs in Dagestan

In 2008, about 40 per cent of IDPs from Chechnya living in Dagestan intended to return, most of them ethnic Chechens. Another 40 per cent said they would not return due to the lack of housing and jobs and, to a much lesser degree, insecurity in Chechnya. The

Federal Migration Service never registered IDPs in Dagestan and so they never received support. Nevertheless, some 37 families received land plots, financial assistance and construction materials from the government in 2007.

IDPs outside of the North Caucasus

It is thought that very few IDPs outside of the North Caucasus are from North Ossetia-Alania; most are from Chechnya and are non-Chechen. The government and humanitarian organisations largely neglected them compared to IDPs who remained in the North Caucasus. This group has largely chosen not to return due to insecurity and most have settled in their area of refuge by their own means.

Obstacles to the achievement of durable solutions

According to the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions, a durable solution is achieved when an IDP no longer has any assistance or protection needs linked to their displacement, and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. The two main obstacles stopping IDPs achieving durable solutions appear to be inadequate housing and difficult access to documentation. In some cases, these obstacles also limit the employment of IDPs, though most IDPs do not appear to face any obstacles that prevent them from accessing jobs on the same basis as non-displaced people.

Lack of adequate housing

Almost all recently surveyed IDPs in Chechnya and Ingushetia stated that housing was their main need. The majority live in private accommodation that they rent or share with relatives, while the rest are in collective centres known as “hostels” in Chechnya and “temporary settlements” (TS) in Ingushetia and Dagestan. A small percentage live in box tents or trailers on their own land. Conditions in all types of accommodation are generally sub-standard and are reportedly the worst in TS in Ingushetia and Dagestan, with inadequate sanitation, ventilation and protection from the elements. Most remaining collective centre residents in the Russian Federation are at risk of eviction since few have adequate contracts or security of tenure. Those without a contract cannot register their residence, and so face difficulty applying for jobs, documents or government benefits.

IDPs have been unable to secure adequate housing for various reasons. Government housing support mainly goes to IDPs with forced migrant status. Granted for a five-year term and renewable on an annual basis, some IDPs have not succeeded in renewing the status, while it was never given to others. Some IDPs who received government housing support report that allocated dwellings have been contested by alleged owners or are in need of significant repairs, and land plots are small, not connected to utilities and far from job opportunities. Compensation for lost or destroyed housing in Chechnya has also not solved the housing problems of IDPs, nor have general housing programmes. This is mainly because the compensation amount has not grown to reflect inflation and housing programmes lack funding. Other reasons why IDPs have not secured housing include the lack of sufficient income or the plan to invest in housing in their place of origin.

Lack of documentation required to enjoy rights

Several documents are important for Russian citizens to access services, jobs and entitlements. These include the internal passport, residence registration and work record book. During the conflict many documents were lost or destroyed and archives burnt, and the absence of these documents poses particular problems for IDPs. Over time, many IDPs have been able to recover their documents, but some documents remain impossible to retrieve. For example, no mechanism has been put in place to reissue veteran status and work service documents. As a result elderly IDPs do not receive the benefits they are due, which forces some of them to work odd jobs to make ends meet.

IDPs face other documentation problems on account of their displacement. Some IDPs have neither permanent nor temporary registration status because they fled without it, or because it was never issued to them. Over 70 per cent of IDPs in Dagestan do not have residence registration, which limits their access to health care, government benefits and documentation such as internal passports. Many IDPs living in TS in Ingushetia have been unable to renew temporary residence registration after being de-registered from government assistance lists, since landlords have not provided proper tenancy contracts. This mainly poses a problem for accessing health care. Some IDPs from Prigorodny district also have difficulty having their permanent residence registration at their place of origin included in their new passport.

Other IDPs also face problems extending or renewing their forced migrant status. The status is needed to apply for government housing support, including the Federal Housing Programme, while people who received assistance for lost housing in North Ossetia-Alania also need forced migrant status to cash housing certificates. They must therefore renew their status to gain access to the money as well as continuously extend the validity of the housing certificates. While IDPs from Prigorodny face increasing difficulty to renew their forced migrant status, many have been successful through the courts.