

12 October 2009

## Russian Federation:

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# Monitoring of IDPs and returnees still needed

*At least 80,000 people are still internally displaced in Russia, more than 15 years after they were first forced to flee their homes. While large-scale hostilities ended several years ago, violence is still extensive in the North Caucasus and human rights abuses continue with perpetrators enjoying impunity. The economy is improving in Chechnya and reconstruction has brought impressive results in Grozny, but corruption and weak local governance continue to delay full recovery.*

*Over 275,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) have returned to Chechnya and North Ossetia, mainly since 1999, but most continue to live in inadequate temporary accommodation. Some returnees to Chechnya report they were under pressure to return from the local authorities, but promises of adequate alternative housing in Chechnya did not always materialise, while compensation programmes have been insufficient to fund permanent housing.*

*IDPs and returnees also lack stable incomes and some still face difficulty in obtaining and recovering documents needed to access their economic, social and political rights. The lack of documents limits IDPs' chances of receiving property compensation, utilities subsidies, a full pension and other social benefits, and of being able to conduct legal transactions. Continued monitoring of IDPs and returnees is needed to ensure they can increasingly enjoy their rights on a par with their non-displaced neighbours.*

## Internal Displacement in the Russian Federation

www.internal-displacement.org

### Internal Displacement in Russia, August 2009

**Total number of IDPs: ... At least 82,150**

Chechen Republic.....	54,637
Republic of Ingushetia.....	14,110
Republic of North Ossetia-Alania.....	2,074
Republic of Dagestan.....	3,709
Outside of the North Caucasus.....	7,620

Figures do not always include IDPs living in the private sector or those displaced by the first war in Chechnya.

Sources: Government, UNHCR, DRC, Vesta



Source: IDMC

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

## Background to displacement

Internal displacement in Russia is largely a result of armed conflict and violence in the Chechen Republic (Chechnya) and the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (North Ossetia).

The fighting in 1992 between ethnic Ingush and Ossetian militants over disputed territory in North Ossetia was the first armed conflict in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most of the Ingush people living in North Ossetia, who were estimated to number between 35,000 and 64,000 people, were forcibly displaced from their homes during the five-day conflict (HRW, 31 May 1996).

In Chechnya over 800,000 people were displaced by two wars, some of them more than once (UNDP, 30 September 2005). Federal troops first went into Chechnya in 1994 to quash the independence movement, and withdrew after a peace agreement was signed in 1996. They returned in 1999 as part of a “counter-terrorist” operation after militants called for the creation of an Islamic state in the North Caucasus, and apartment buildings in several Russian cities were bombed.

While large-scale fighting has ended, the conflicts and their consequences have yet to be fully resolved. Moscow declared the Ingush-Ossetian conflict resolved in 2007, and in 2009 announced the end of the decade-long “counter-terrorist” operation in Chechnya. However, reconciliation initiatives have yet to be established for communities affected by either conflict.

## 2009: Intensified violence and ongoing impunity for human rights abuses

Insecurity in the North Caucasus still presents a threat to citizens and a barrier to durable solutions for IDPs. Violence has escalated in 2009 as militants have stepped up their activities and government forces have retaliated (NYT, 30 August 2009; HRW, 3 September 2009; CSIS, 31 August 2009). Most of the violence has occurred in Ingushetia, where militants have targeted high-ranking government officials and law enforcement officers. Human rights abuses have also continued in Chechnya, which have included the use of torture and ill-treatment in custody, extra-judicial executions, arbitrary and secret detentions, enforced disappearances and punitive house-burnings (AI, 1 July 2009; HRW, 2 July 2009). People exposing these cases have been threatened, harassed and killed, which has curtailed human rights reporting in Chechnya (HRW, 4 September 2009; RFE/RL, 20 August 2009).

While President Medvedev has called for an investigation into the murders of human rights defenders and outlined a plan to make the ongoing struggle against militant attacks more effective, there has been virtually no punishment of perpetrators of human rights abuses in the North Caucasus. People in the region generally avoid legal proceedings, which are lengthy, expensive and subject to corruption (ODI, 28 February 2009). Court judgments are not always implemented and the independence of the judiciary has also been questioned (CoE, 8 June 2008; UN, 29 May 2008). Victims of human rights abuses and their families who report cases face a heavy burden of proof,

and often threats, harassment or even revenge attacks. The European Court of Human Rights has found Russia responsible for human rights violations in more than 100 applications by victims and their families who failed to secure justice in Russia, and while Russia has paid full compensation to the applicants, no one has been held accountable for the crimes and there is still no official and up-to-date database of missing persons and unidentified bodies, nor a policy for exhuming and identifying the bodies found in over 60 mass graves in Chechnya (Ombudsman of Chechnya, 16 April 2009; Vesti, 10 June 2009).

### **IDP and returnee numbers**

There are no authoritative figures of the number of IDPs or returnees in Russia. The government counts people who fled Chechnya or North Ossetia to another part of Russia and qualify for “forced migrant” status under the Law on Forced Migrants. The government’s Federal Migration Service (FMS) also counts IDPs in need of emergency assistance. Otherwise, non-government sources compile numbers of IDPs in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan.

The government reported that there were about 6,500 people on FMS assistance lists and some 19,000 people with forced migrant status. The FMS lists include almost 3,900 people displaced within North Ossetia. The last IDPs on the list in Chechnya and Ingushetia were de-registered in 2007 and 2009 respectively. As for forced migrant status, 6,600 people displaced from North Ossetia, 4,800 people displaced from Chechnya in Ingushetia (UNHCR, March 2009 and 20 August 2009) and almost 7,500 people

displaced from Chechnya outside of the North Caucasus (Government of the Russian Federation, 1 July 2009) still had the status in mid-2009.

However, UNHCR estimated in 2009 there were still about 74,000 IDPs in the North Caucasus, including some 54,000 people still displaced within Chechnya, about 10,000 IDPs from Chechnya in Ingushetia, and about 4,000 IDPs from Chechnya in Dagestan (UNHCR, 20 August 2009). There were also some 4,000 IDPs from North Ossetia in Ingushetia and about 2,000 in North Ossetia (UNHCR, 20 August 2009). A non-government estimate of IDPs living outside of the North Caucasus was unavailable.

As for returnees, the government reported that some 255,000 people returned to Chechnya from 1999 to 2009 (Government of the Chechen Republic, 24 March 2009). Up to 60 per cent returned to their former homes or apartments, and the rest to live with relatives (Government of the Chechen Republic, 27 March 2009). Some returnees were displaced again within Chechnya to worse living conditions in their area of second or third displacement. According to UNHCR, the lack of permanent housing and stable work have remained the main obstacles to return in Chechnya (UN, 1 July 2009). However, IDPs from southern Chechnya have stated continuing insecurity and trauma from the conflict are additional obstacles to their return.

Over 25,000 people have returned to North Ossetia since 1994 with government assistance (UN, 20 August 2009). Returnees live either in new houses or in trailers on their land where construction is ongoing. Some IDPs from North Ossetia

have remained displaced as their original homes are now located within a restricted “water conservation zone” or areas prone to flooding, though the government has offered some of these IDPs land plots in another settlement in Prigorodny district. Ongoing tensions (especially after the terrorist attack on the school in Beslan in 2004) and the occupation of IDPs’ homes by others have also prevented the return of IDPs to some areas.

### **Difficulty obtaining documents**

Many IDPs were never granted forced migrant status, while others lost it even though they still faced problems related to their displacement. The status is valid for five years and can be extended on an annual basis if the applicant has been prevented from “settlement at the new place of residence”. In some cases this point has been interpreted too narrowly, with IDPs who received property compensation losing the status even though the compensation has not been sufficient for them to buy housing. Ethnic Chechens faced particular difficulty in accessing forced migrant status since some officials rejected their applications on the basis that they had not fled ethnic discrimination in Chechnya and could therefore safely return.

IDPs have also been progressively de-registered from the FMS assistance lists, and sometimes have been put under pressure to return. In Chechnya the government de-registered the remaining recipients of assistance in 2007, and in Ingushetia, the remaining 3,100 recipients were de-registered in 2009 (Memorial, 26 May 2009; MHG, 14 April 2009). Some IDPs in Ingushetia reported being de-registered because they signed applica-

tions to return to Chechnya in the face of threats that their child allowances, pensions and unemployment benefits would otherwise be terminated. Some IDPs refused to sign the application for return, but were later shown that they had been struck off the register on the basis of an FMS report that they were not residing in a government-provided “temporary settlement”. Few took legal action, but those who did faced difficulty proving they signed the forms under pressure (Memorial, 26 May 2009). FMS representatives visited Chechnya and Ingushetia to monitor the situation of IDPs in early 2009, but their conclusions were not made public (Government of the Russian Federation, 1 July 2009 and 12 February 2009).

Registering as residents in their place of displacement still proves difficult for many IDPs. Landlords are reluctant to register them, and often (unlawfully) demand that they pay for utilities one year in advance. To receive benefits, most unregistered IDPs must return to the place where their permanent residence is registered. Most IDPs in Chechnya are now living in their area of permanent registration where they can access medical care or education, though some have problems accessing social benefits. In Dagestan, at least 74 per cent of IDPs from Chechnya do not have temporary residence registration, which limits their access to entitlements such as health care, official employment and a pension.

Recovering documents lost during their flight or destroyed during conflict (a number of archives were burned down during the conflict in Chechnya) still poses problems for IDPs, limiting their capacity to conduct legal transactions and apply for property compensation, utilities

subsidies, a full pension and other social benefits. In Chechnya, IDPs may have documents reissued if two witnesses support their claim; however, the search for former neighbours or witnesses is reportedly time-consuming and the process burdensome. To recover documents which survived the conflict, IDPs must travel to different institutions in Chechnya, present extensive documentation, pay bribes and follow cumbersome procedures (ODI, 28 February 2009).

### **Lack of permanent housing**

There was widespread destruction of housing and infrastructure in Chechnya during the two wars. A survey has estimated that over 110,000 houses and about 50,000 apartments in Grozny were fully or partially destroyed (ODI, 28 February 2009). Some properties have remained unrepaired for up to 14 years. International organisations have built or repaired over 20,000 houses in Ingushetia and Chechnya since 2000 (UN, 1 May 2009), but some 60,000 people in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and North Ossetia still needed a permanent home in 2009 (UN, 1 July 2009).

IDPs and returnees live in government-provided “hostels”, in private rented dwellings, or with relatives. In mid-2009, about 4,600 IDPs in Chechnya were living in 17 hostels, some 3,000 people were living in over 60 hostels in Ingushetia, over 300 people were living in eight hostels in Dagestan and an unknown number were living in hostels in North Ossetia (UNHCR, 20 August 2009). Outside the North Caucasus, 15 hostels house people with forced migrant status (FMS, no date, information accessed August 2009). An estimated

50,000 IDPs in Chechnya and 8,500 IDPs in Ingushetia live in private accommodation or with relatives. In North Ossetia, at least 100 internally displaced households received land plots and a government subsidy to build a house in the purpose-built settlement of Novy. In Dagestan, IDPs who initially found refuge in an informal camp were allocated land plots, construction materials and cash grants.

Hostels for IDPs have been progressively closed. Outside of the North Caucasus, in Pyatigorsk for example, IDPs have received successive notices to leave hostels and have been evicted without alternative accommodation. In Chechnya, the closure of hostels intensified in late 2007 and in 2008, and by mid-2009 about 1,500 families had left or been evicted from the hostels in Chechnya. The government reports having given residents several months notice of closures, but many residents have stated that they were not adequately consulted and that they were forced to leave without due process or any secure prospects of adequate alternative accommodation (AI, 1 July 2009; Memorial, 7 April 2009; Memorial, 26 May 2009). In 2009, the FMS terminated contracts with 22 hostels in Ingushetia on the basis of an agreement between the presidents of Chechnya and Ingushetia to return IDPs to Chechnya. Local authorities subsequently passed a decree for the closure of these hostels. In contrast, there has been no pressure on IDPs from North Ossetia to leave Ingushetia, though the authorities have not actively promoted their integration.

The government has offered various housing options to IDPs leaving the hostels in Chechnya. These include apartments and land plots, and also funds to

pay rent with and a letter of guarantee for receipt of a dwelling from the municipal housing stock. In 2008, over 3,000 people or almost 700 families received a housing option, with over half of those also receiving 18,000 roubles (\$570) to cover rent for six months, 2,000 roubles (\$65) for transportation and a letter of guarantee for receipt of a government dwelling. However, only seven families received apartments based on the letter of guarantee by mid-2009. In rural areas, IDPs were moved into hostels or given land plots since funds were not available for reconstruction of houses or provision of facilities.

There have been several problems with the housing solutions offered to IDPs in Chechnya. Apartments are sometimes claimed by several families, and some are in need of major repairs (AI, 1 July 2009; Memorial, 26 May 2009). IDPs report that 18,000 roubles is insufficient to rent an apartment in Grozny for six months and that the letter of guarantee does not appear to be a legal document or specify a period of validity (Memorial, 26 May 2009; CoE, 29 September 2009). Living conditions in hostels in rural areas are especially poor, and many vulnerable IDPs lack the funds or physical capacity to build on land plots offered to them, even when construction materials are provided.

Federal bodies proposed in 2008 the establishment of a new mechanism to provide housing to people dispossessed as a result of the conflict in Chechnya, but no progress had been reported by 2009 (Government of the Russian Federation, 31 December 2008).

### **Property compensation proving an ineffective remedy**

People whose property was destroyed in conflict are entitled to compensation or assistance. In the case of property destroyed in Chechnya, those who opt to reside in Chechnya receive a maximum of 350,000 roubles (\$11,000) and maintain ownership of their property, while those who opt to settle elsewhere and forego ownership of their property receive a maximum of 125,000 roubles (\$4,000). Overall some 57,000 people had received compensation in Chechnya by mid-2009 (UNHCR, 20 August 2009). The number who had received compensation outside of Chechnya was not available.

These programmes have not solved the housing problems of IDPs. The fixed compensation for destroyed property in Chechnya has been increasingly insufficient to rebuild original housing or buy new housing. Also, only owners of fully destroyed homes have been entitled to compensation, and so owners of partially destroyed housing, tenants and occupants of employer-provided housing, and those who did not manage to buy their housing before the start of the conflict, are all disqualified. Payments have been slow and sometimes blocked, and recipients may be expected to pay at least half of the compensation as a kickback (Memorial, 3 August 2009). False applications have also further complicated the process. The Ombudsman's office in Chechnya has highlighted several inadequacies in the property compensation schemes (ODI, 28 February 2009), and the head of the republic's parliament has repeatedly ordered officials to speed up compensation payments (President and Government of

the Republic of Chechnya, 2 February 2009 *and* 10 April 2009).

One positive development is that applicants no longer need to include their residence registration for the property destroyed in their application for compensation (President and Government of Republic of Chechnya, 2 February 2009). The Constitutional Court ruled in October 2008 that not being registered as resident in housing before its destruction could not serve as a basis for depriving an applicant of the right to social protection (Constitutional Court, 6 October 2008). While a press release on the issue was posted on the Chechen government website, it is unclear whether information on this has been disseminated to the public.

People with housing destroyed as a result of the conflict in North Ossetia are entitled to state assistance for housing and over 1,000 IDP families have received this assistance since March 2005. In contrast to the compensation scheme for property destroyed in Chechnya, state assistance is linked to inflation, and depends not on settlement location but rather on the size and cost of the destroyed house, the current cost per square metre of housing and the cost of construction materials, and the number of family members.

### **Lack of job opportunities**

The lack of a stable income also continues to be a problem for IDPs and others. The republics of the North Caucasus have the highest poverty rates in the country. Conflict devastated Chechnya's industry, infrastructure and agriculture, and the

official unemployment rate in Chechnya is still as high as 49 per cent (Ministry of Finance of Chechen Republic, 2009). The economy is slowly being re-established, though corruption and poor governance continue to present serious obstacles to full recovery (ECHO, 15 May 2009).

A positive development has been the restoration of the social benefit system across the region, which includes payments for children, veterans, and elderly, disabled and unemployed people. They are paid almost regularly and relatively reliably despite ensuing corruption (FEWER, 26 June 2009). However, an estimated 60 per cent of people who are entitled to assistance are reportedly either not receiving it or only in part because they are unaware of their entitlements or the process of obtaining them, or they are made to pay unlawful fees to receive the benefits (ODI, 28 February 2009).

Most IDPs in the region report that they live off social benefits, small trade, temporary construction work, humanitarian assistance and remittances from relatives living elsewhere (ODI, 28 February 2009). People explain that they must pay a bribe to get a job in construction or the civil service, and that there is little job security and salaries may not be paid. In rural areas, people work in construction and farming, but mainly at the subsistence level due to poor irrigation systems. Despite the difficulties of earning an income, fewer people are seeking work outside Chechnya and the North Caucasus due to continuing intolerance and discrimination against Chechens (ODI, 28 February 2009; Memorial, 26 May 2009).

## Health care and education systems slowly returning to normal

Despite increased government funding, the health care system in Chechnya has still not been fully re-established. It broke down after the collapse of the Soviet Union and crumbled further as a result of the conflicts. The local Ministry of Health still does not have sufficient funds or capacity to provide adequate health care to the population. Medical facilities are poorly equipped, staff do not receive timely training, there are few specialists in villages and drugs are expensive. Preventive services with respect to the health of children, youth and women are not given priority.

IDPs reportedly do not face any particular difficulties in accessing medical services provided they have residence registration, though many cannot afford to pay for the services. While some IDPs have benefited from free medical consultations by Médecins Sans Frontières, those trying to use the government health care system have struggled to afford medical tests, drugs, special treatments or unofficial fees for consultations and prescriptions. As a result many illnesses go untreated, including HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. In Dagestan, IDPs without residence registration cannot access health services, and a medical insurance policy is needed in order to use free medical services. Some have had to return to Chechnya, where they are registered as residents, to get a referral to a hospital in Dagestan. IDPs, as with other vulnerable residents, face difficulty in obtaining a certificate of disability from the Medical Commission in order to receive due benefits.

The impact of conflict on peoples' mental health is increasingly apparent, in the form of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and sleeping disorders. About 80 per cent of children in Chechnya reportedly need some form of psychological help (UNICEF, 2006). UNICEF reported that 15,000 children have benefited from 31 psycho-social centres, and more are to be established (UNICEF, 2009; UN, 29 January 2009). However, there is a shortage of specialists in this area (WHO, November 2008). IDPs outside of Chechnya report that the psychological trauma they suffered needs to be treated, but is ignored as psycho-social assistance is seen as a luxury. There are two medico-psychological rehabilitation centres for people with forced migrant status, in Moscow and Krasnodar (FMS, no date, information accessed August 2009).

All IDP children are entitled to free education within the mainstream school system throughout Russia. A small number of children in Chechnya do not go to school because of family issues, repeated change of residence, lack of residence registration or poverty (UNICEF, 2009). The main problems with schools are the lack of hot meals for children, lack of methodological literature and learning materials for teachers, inadequate training opportunities for teachers and a high teacher-student ratio (UNICEF, 2009). Currently, the government is repairing 142 out of 437 schools in Chechnya.

The World Bank and the UN Children's Fund launched a \$2.1 million project for vulnerable young people in the North Caucasus in late 2008, after finding that the region had the highest rate of youth who were neither in school nor work in the country. The establishment of Child

Rights Ombudsman's offices in the North Caucasus is a significant development, but their capacity to monitor and report on child rights-related violations could be strengthened.

### **Continuing reduction of international assistance**

The role of international humanitarian organisations has decreased significantly in recent years due to diminished funding, the changing needs of the beneficiaries and government policy aimed at scaling back international humanitarian operations in the North Caucasus (FEWER, 26 June 2009). Donors had committed or pledged only about \$8 million in mid-2009, compared to almost \$25 million in 2008 (Relief Web, 7 September 2009). International organisations providing assistance to IDPs in the North Caucasus include UNHCR, UN Children's Fund, UN Development Programme, World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Committee of the Red Cross, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, International Rescue Committee, World Vision, the Danish Refugee Council and the International Medical Corps. Local NGOs including the Caucasian Refugee Council, Memorial, Nizam and Vesta also target IDPs in their work. Between them they provide legal counselling, housing, income-generation opportunities, agriculture support, infrastructure reconstruction, school meals and medical assistance in addition to general monitoring and support for local NGO capacity strengthening. UNHCR is an observer on the "Public Council on Safeguarding of Rights and Freedoms of People and Citizens of the Chechen Republic" in Grozny and at the district level.

European institutions have also remained engaged on IDPs and human rights in Russia. In mid-2009 the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on IDPs in Europe. It called on member states with internally displaced populations, such as Russia, to fully respect the right of IDPs to voluntarily choose their settlement location, to more vigorously pursue reconciliation processes, find adequate housing solutions for the most vulnerable IDPs and monitor the sustainability of their return, settlement and relocation elsewhere (CoE, 24 June 2009). Also in 2009, the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee visited the North Caucasus for the eleventh time, and the Commissioner for Human Rights visited Ingushetia and Chechnya following the killings of human rights activists. The European Union is still the leading donor in the North Caucasus and has held multiple consultations with Russia on human rights and a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The European Parliament has recommended that the renewal of the Agreement should be used as an opportunity to press for an improvement of the human rights situation in the country (European Parliament, 2 April 2009) and have an operable human rights clause (European Parliament, 1 October 2009). The European Parliament has also passed a number of resolutions on human rights and the rule of law in Russia and held public hearings and events on the same issues.

*Note: This is a summary of IDMC's new internal displacement profile on the Russian Federation. The full profile is available online [here](#).*

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## **About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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