



Evaluation of UNHCR's
policy on refugees in
urban areas.

*Report of a workshop,
Moscow, March 2002*

Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit

UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) is committed to the systematic examination and assessment of UNHCR policies, programmes, projects and practices. EPAU also promotes rigorous research on issues related to the work of UNHCR and encourages an active exchange of ideas and information between humanitarian practitioners, policymakers and the research community. All of these activities are undertaken with the purpose of strengthening UNHCR's operational effectiveness, thereby enhancing the organization's capacity to fulfil its mandate on behalf of refugees and other displaced people. The work of the unit is guided by the principles of transparency, independence, consultation, relevance and integrity.

Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Case Postale 2500
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

Tel: (41 22) 739 8249

Fax: (41 22) 739 7344

e-mail: hqep00@unhcr.org

internet: www.unhcr.org/epau

All EPAU evaluation reports are placed in the public domain. Electronic versions are posted on the UNHCR website and hard copies can be obtained by contacting EPAU. They may be quoted, cited and copied, provided that the source is acknowledged. The views expressed in EPAU publications are not necessarily those of UNHCR. The designations and maps used do not imply the expression of any opinion or recognition on the part of UNHCR concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Summary.....	3
Workshop findings and recommendations	7
Annex I : Comments on the individual assistance programme in Moscow	13

Introduction

Background

1. The number of refugees to be found in the urban areas of developing and middle-income countries appears to have increased considerably in recent years. It is a trend which has given rise to a wide range of concerns amongst UNHCR, its partners and the states concerned.
2. It was in this context that UNHCR issued a new policy on refugees in urban areas at the end of 1997. The stated objective of the policy statement was "to provide clear guidelines for the provision of assistance to and the promotion of solutions for refugees in urban areas." In a covering memorandum to the document, and in response to NGO criticism of the policy, UNHCR stated that it would be revised as necessary in the light of experience and comments received from stakeholders.
3. At the end of 1999, UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) was asked to undertake a comprehensive review of the new policy and its implementation.

The evaluation process

4. As a first step in this process, a desk-based global survey was undertaken, so as to identify key issues for further research and analysis. As a second step, a number of case studies were selected for detailed review. To date, these have included New Delhi, India; Cairo, Egypt; Nairobi, Kenya; and Bangkok, Thailand. In December 2001, EPAU issued an interim report, titled *Evaluation of the implementation of UNHCR's policy on refugees in urban areas*.
5. As envisaged in that report, a regional workshop on refugees in urban areas of Eastern Europe took place in Moscow, from 5 - 7 March 2002. The workshop was attended by around 30 stakeholders, including UNHCR staff members and NGO personnel from six countries: Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Poland, Russian Federation and Ukraine.
6. The workshop was also attended by an independent evaluation team which is undertaking a global review of UNHCR's function. Prior to the workshop, the team examined the situation of refugees, and the services provided to them, in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Also prior to the workshop, some of the visiting UNHCR staff members held a meeting with the newly established refugee association 'OPORA', whose request to establish an NGO had just been approved by the Russian authorities.

The Moscow workshop

7. The objectives of the Moscow workshop were originally twofold: first, to provide additional input for EPAU's review of UNHCR policy on refugees in urban areas; and second, to examine and make proposals in relation to the services that UNHCR provides to refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas of Eastern Europe.

8. A third objective was formulated in view of the participation of the evaluation team: to provide additional input from countries in the region to the evaluation of UNHCR's community services function. Annex I of this report present the team's comments on the new individual assistance programme for refugees in the Moscow region.

Summary

Refugees in Eastern Europe

9. Urban refugees in Eastern Europe constitute the majority of refugees in the region. Assisting and protecting them is consequently the main challenge for UNHCR operations there.

10. Urban refugee caseloads in Eastern Europe are made up mainly of families, i.e., including many women and children. They are not primarily single males as the urban refugee policy may have assumed. Protection, programming and community services activities should therefore serve the needs of women, children and the elderly as well as men in the urban environment.

11. It would appear that many asylum seekers and refugees arrive in the region after passing through other countries, and are in fact in transit to other countries. Many wish to move onwards (and usually westwards) from Eastern Europe. While this may be the case, extending the term 'irregular movers' indiscriminately to all refugees should be avoided, because of its perjorative connotations.

Protection problems

12. Asylum seekers and refugees in Eastern Europe experience a wide range of protection problems. The lack of documents for many of those living in Moscow, and difficulties in obtaining local residence registration in many other cities of Eastern Europe, obstruct access to social services, basic medical care and education. This issue also obstructs access to employment and makes 'self-reliance' a relative concept that for many can only be achieved by means of based on illegal and informal employment.

13. The protection problems experienced by asylum seekers and refugees are dangerously exacerbated by high levels of intolerance and the growing incidence of racist attacks, most of which go unpunished. For obvious reasons, Africans are particularly affected by this problem. The human costs are great; the fear of such attacks obstructs freedom of movement around the city, efforts at self-reliance, and in the longer term, integration. In general, it must be noted, the states of Eastern Europe (unlike those of Central Europe, which are seeking entry to the European Union) have made little progress in assuming responsibility for refugee and asylum matters.

Assistance programmes

14. Multi-sector assistance programmes supported by UNHCR continue to be valid in the current context of Eastern Europe. Such programmes include the provision of subsistence allowances to vulnerable families, coverage of medical care and education support programmes until such time as access to these services and to

legal employment can be secured. When there are no welfare benefits in place, no legal jobs available and no extended family with resources to spare, UNHCR should assume responsibility of covering the essential needs of persons of concern to the Office.

15. Housing is a key issue which is generally not addressed through these multi-sectoral assistance. In Eastern Europe, however, the link between housing and the need for official residence registration, which provides access to services and legal employment, makes the provision of housing a potential protection tool which warrants further consideration.

Meeting refugee needs

16. In Eastern Europe, refugees live in difficult urban environments where harassment and lack of protection are key elements in life, and where housing and the means to live are rarely guaranteed. In this context, it is important to ensure that the psycho-social needs of refugees are effectively addressed.

17. Many of UNHCR's activities in the region - following up on appeals in court, obtaining documents and registration, dealing with harassment, evictions and detentions - require a heavy investment of time by UNHCR and its implementing partners. Nevertheless, they constitute core protection activities and their continuation is warranted. At the same time, efforts must be made to develop local capacities, involving UNHCR's beneficiaries, local authorities and the media,. Only in this way will sustainable national asylum systems be developed.

18. The UNHCR staff who are responsible for community services activities have an important role to play in improving the quality and impact of the organization's programmes in Eastern Europe. This is because such staff members are in a good position:

- to develop a better understanding of beneficiary needs, community structures and coping strategies;
- to address the special protection needs of women and children, including the education needs of children, the issue of domestic violence and abuse, and the referral of particularly vulnerable cases for resettlement in the case of Russian Federation; and,
- to formulate assistance programmes that build as far as possible on community strengths, that require involvement and reasonable commitment on the part of the refugees and which do not generate long-term apathy.

The role of NGOs

19. The relationship between the state authorities and NGOs in Eastern Europe varies. While many NGOs are financially dependent on UNHCR, they nevertheless play a substantial role in the field of advocacy, and in filling protection and assistance gaps. In this respect, members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, due to their local prestige and their historical links with the state, have

proven to be effective operational partner. This relationship should be further cultivated.

Durable solutions

20. Local integration has been and continues to be the mainstay of UNHCR's approach to durable solutions for refugees in Eastern Europe. At the same time, it has to be recognized that the political and socio-economic context for local integration is not particularly conducive. Moreover, it is not the solution desired by many refugees, who would prefer to resettle in other parts of the world.

21. As previous case studies of urban refugee situations have concluded, the availability of physical and legal protection, as well as equitable access to the labour market, is a prerequisite for local integration. Long-term counselling by UNHCR will also normally be required, especially in those situations where refugees would prefer to move on from their country of asylum. In addition, public information and awareness-raising activities are essential, in order to foster a more receptive and supportive environment for the integration of refugees.

22. Resettlement is currently only available in Moscow, and there is consequently a danger that the pursuit of this solution will prove to be discriminatory in nature. At the same time, the Moscow resettlement programme, despite its limited scale, serves to strengthen the Russian asylum system by easing pressure on local resources and by providing a tangible example of burden-sharing. For those African refugees who find themselves in Moscow, and for whom local integration cannot be considered as an option, resettlement is a vital tool of protection.

Workshop findings and recommendations

The operational environment

23. According to one of the workshop participants, refugees or asylum seekers in this region “exist but they do not live.” The difficult environment in which refugees and asylum seekers are forced to live can largely be attributed to a number of factors: the momentous political and socio-economic change that the states and peoples of Eastern Europe have experienced in recent years; their historical isolation from the international community and the international refugee regime; the limited ability and willingness of governments in the region to implement the international agreements they have signed including those relating to the status of refugees. As a result of these factors, the protection of ‘foreigners’ is generally a secondary issue.

24. Those people who seek asylum in the region face a number of difficulties. In most countries, the refugee status determination procedures are very slow. Asylum seekers are often placed in a state of limbo while their cases are processed, due to a lack of documentation. In Moscow, that can be up to two years. In some countries, recognition as a refugee does not automatically guarantee that a person is able to exercise his or her social and economic rights, since these rights are linked to residential registration.

25. The situation is aggravated by the negative attitude of host communities towards refugees. In the case of Russia, for example, refugees are often looked at with suspicion by the local communities because of the on-going conflict in the North Caucasus. Reports of racially motivated attacks against Africans, compiled by the protestant chaplaincy in Moscow, illustrate two important issues: first, the public hostility towards foreigners in general, but in particular to visible minorities; and second, the lack of state protection towards refugees and asylum seekers. In the words of one workshop participant, “UNHCR does not speak about racism enough,” particularly when few others voice their concerns.

26. This trend seems to be more acute in states such as Russian Federation and Ukraine. In Moldova, where many people vividly remember the hardships they endured during the recent internal conflict, the level of tolerance towards refugees seems to be much higher.

27. Such an operational environment poses a number of challenges to UNHCR. On one hand, UNHCR struggles to ensure that the government assumes its full responsibility for protection and assistance to refugees. As a result, there is a danger of creating parallel structures, which can lead to the perception that refugee problems belong to UNHCR and a few NGO, rather than the state.

28. On the other hand, while the government is unable or unwilling to protect refugees and meet their material needs, the office is obliged to fill the gap, hoping that the activities of UNHCR will eventually be complemented by and ultimately taken over by the government.

29. To complicate matters further, UNHCR offices in the region are under pressure to reduce their expenditure on refugee assistance and to implement an exit strategy.

Legal and physical protection

30. Given the difficulties posed by the overall environment, workshop participants pointed to a number of ways to improve the legal and physical protection of refugees.

31. While searching for long-term improvements to the legal and physical protection of refugees and asylum seekers, some practical and interim mechanisms should be negotiated with the authorities, especially with respect to non-refoulement.

32. There is a need to maintain an active programme of advocacy work through diplomatic and other channels, so as to reach the highest level of government and to ensure that states assume their proper responsibility in the refugee domain. Such efforts must, however, be sensitive to the self-perception of states in the region and explain why those states have an interest in fulfilling their international obligations.

33. Access, clarity, transparency and speed are the main issues regarding refugee status determination procedures in Eastern Europe. Finding ways to increase the capacity of eligibility officers is a primary concern of UNHCR in the region. Training needs to include sensitization on cultural and gender issues, targeting interpreters as well as interviewers. Refugees should be fully advised of their rights and informed of the protection services and mechanisms which they can access in case of problems.

34. In recent years, most of UNHCR's attention has been devoted to refugees and asylum seekers living in capital cities and other urban centres such as St. Petersburg. Additional efforts should be made to assess the prospects for refugees in other areas, especially with regard to their legal and physical and legal protection.

Good practice

35. The workshop identified a number of examples of good practice in the protection of refugees:

- training officials by means of joint workshops & activities
- providing officials with experience abroad
- training of trainers and legal clinics to provide opportunities for practical experience
- participation of UNHCR and/or NGO representatives in asylum appeals procedures
- supporting a network of lawyers working throughout the regions is a useful way of injecting awareness through concrete cases in the courts on refugee problems and refugee rights; creates contact points with beneficiaries in many locations and helps UNHCR to be aware

of their needs and the efficiency of the RSD procedure in these locations.

36. Where UNHCR is unable to increase the number of eligibility officers (limitations on hiring for the civil service may prevent this), it has increased the capacity of RSD bodies through providing resources to cover other needs, such as interpreters.

Assistance and self reliance

37. The 1997 policy paper states that “as a rule, UNHCR’s assistance should be reduced to a minimum.” It is true that in many cases, it is not only refugees in this region whose noses are just above the water. The local population, especially those who move from one place to another without any residential permit inside the country are placed in a similar situation. UNHCR or its implementing partners may not wish to be seen that they are giving preferential treatment; and the authorities in ‘taking over’ would have an even more severe constraint.

38. However, the level of assistance UNHCR provides is closely linked to the overall protection situation. As described above, refugees and asylum seekers are placed in situations where they face a prolonged state of ‘limbo’ pending status determination, where they are deprived of access to public services (principally due to lack of residence permit), where they have no right to engage in wage-earning or income-generating activities until their status is determined.

39. The situation in this region appears to reinforce the findings from other case studies: the withdrawal or progressive reduction of UNHCR assistance may lead to the impoverishment and marginalization of urban refugees, especially the most vulnerable groups. Problems that are likely to arise, if the assistance is to be reduced, should be carefully examined and taken into consideration when the level of assistance is determined by the office. The over-riding principle should be that the withdrawal of assistance should not lead to a protection crisis, nor force onward movement, and thus a shifting of the burden to other countries.

40. In this regard, the new individual assistance programme (IAP) that the office in Moscow has introduced is noteworthy. This new assistance programme is intended to replace the current cash assistance programme and uses a more transparent and objective ‘open criteria’. The criteria was developed based on the experience and recognition of UNHCR and implementing partners that using vulnerability criteria often forces refugees to act in a desperate and humiliating manner in order to qualify for specific types of support. It also forces social workers to play a ‘policing’ role in determining the real needs of refugees, resulting in mistrust between the agencies and beneficiaries. The assistance programme is integration oriented and continued assistance is linked to conditions to be fulfilled by the asylum seekers, eg. Russian language course or skills training attendance.

41. The participants generally were of the view that this is an innovative approach and has a number of positive aspects. It will most likely reduce the level of mistrust, increase the transparency of UNHCR and the relevant implementing partners, and bring out more information as to the activities and aspirations of the refugee population in general. For example, it was reported that while in the past, families

tried hard to fit the 'single female-headed household' category to receive cash assistance, after the introduction of this new programme, missing husbands started to 'reappear'.

42. However, participants also felt that there is a need to continue cash assistance, to a limited extent, to help those who may fall through the cracks, with the introduction of the new programme. On this issue, one colleague noted "we are all dependent on cash to live in one way or another and to say this accusingly of an asylum seeker as if he/she should not be, is shocking." Given also the Moscow environment, the aspirations towards better integration through language and skills training lead to a void where the legal conditions to pursue integration are absent. A thorough evaluation will be needed of the impact of this new assistance programme. (See second part of the report.)

43. While most of the countries continue to use vulnerability criteria as the basis for material and cash assistance, in Ukraine, for example, UNHCR and its implementing partner sought refugee involvement in determining stricter criteria, in an effort to reduce the numbers on cash assistance. More open and transparent consultation produced less disputes over the results, since criteria could not be contested by the beneficiaries at a later stage.

44. The work of Gratis, a Russian NGO, in psycho-social assistance elicited interest. They not only provide individual and group counselling to trauma/torture victims but also publish know-how based on their scientific data collection. This targets albeit a specialised sector of the local population, but one which can have an impact on working with refugees and migrants.

45. Active partnership with other UN agencies should be established with a view to seeking a possibility to include refugee population as beneficiaries in their medical and other programmes. In some countries, UNHCR provides financial assistance to local hospitals for refurbishment and in return, refugees and asylum seekers manage to gain access to medical services.

46. Although it is the desire of most parents that their children be educated, not all the children are able to attend schools because of economic hardships they face in their daily life. In order to encourage school attendance of children, the assistance in kind, such as school supplies, clothing, lunch etc. in addition to transportation fees may be considered. In Belarus, summer camps organized with the participation of local children have proven to be successful in promoting greater acceptance in the community.

47. Housing issue appears to be one of the biggest problems that asylum seekers and refugees face on a daily basis in all the countries reviewed. Their situation is aggravated that most of them seem to prefer to stay in the capital city, where the accommodation shortage is the most acute and where the police harassment may be more severe. They continue to remain in these cities, mainly because there are more opportunities for employment; more opportunities to move on to the West; and more access to available services. In some countries, the search for permanent housing immediately after recognition poses another serious challenge. The ideas of establishing collective housing, host family schemes, and funding the renovation of public housing in rural areas were shared as possible options. In Eastern Europe the

linkage with registration and access to social services and legal employment makes housing a more critical issue.

Durable solutions

48. In most countries, the programmes are prepared on the assumption that for most refugees and asylum seekers, the local integration would be the most realistic solution for the time being.

49. There always exists scepticism on the part of UNHCR and implementing partners, however, whether beneficiaries also share the same view as to the most appropriate durable solution for themselves. Many asylum seekers and refugees appear to regard their stay in the present country of asylum as temporary before they find an opportunity to move on to further West.

50. Whatever their motive may be, however, given the limited opportunity for resettlement and the lack of voluntary repatriation opportunity for many of them in the immediate future, local integration is perhaps the most realistic solution for a majority of the population. By encouraging the refugees and asylum seekers to pursue this durable solution, it would address the need for a long-term approach to planning and counselling. Public information and awareness efforts should simultaneously be carried out with a view to creating a more receptive and supportive atmosphere for refugees.

51. The integration plans implemented by Bulgarian Red Cross involve a detailed planning and consultation process with individual refugees. Although this approach is likely to become more difficult as the caseload grows, it could usefully be replicated elsewhere.

52. Processing for resettlement, which seems to be the preferred option of many refugees and asylum seekers in the region, is only available in Russia. In this regard, a cautious approach will be required to prevent resettlement from becoming a discriminatory tool. Despite the limited scale of the programme in terms of geographical and population coverage, however, resettlement appears to provide a permanent solution for some refugees and strengthen asylum system by removing pressure from the country of asylum. This is particularly the case for a minority group of Africans in Russia, for whom local integration is not considered as an option, and for whom resettlement is a tool of protection.

Community development approach and refugee participation

53. In environments where services and privileges can often be 'bought', there is a natural tendency to distrust any 'authorities', including UNHCR. It is consequently important for UNHCR and its implementing partners to ensure transparency in communicating their policy and in providing advice and assistance to beneficiaries.

54. The involvement of refugees in planning, monitoring and evaluation of programmes is part and parcel of the community development approach to programme implementation which UNHCR has endorsed. While this has great

value, the workshop highlighted some difficulties in adopting such an approach in the urban context.

55. First, effective participation and consultation is a time-consuming process, and UNHCR and implementing agencies are under the constant pressure to produce immediate solutions to the problems at hand in order to gain trust from the refugee community.

56. Second, in the urban context, it is particularly difficult to know the caseload, which may be dispersed across a city or sometimes across a country. This makes it a difficult task for both UNHCR offices and NGOs working with refugees to develop a good beneficiary profile.

57. Third, in Russia alone, there are approximately 150,000 Afghans. Considering that only 6,000 are registered with UNHCR, it is assumed that many others somehow manage to survive without approaching UNHCR. Any attempt to know more about the life of the refugee population, be it their demographic structure, the resources available to them or the economic activities which they undertake, is consequently obstructed.

58. Fourth, while dealing with a 'community' which is composed of refugees from different nationalities and ethnic origins, reaching a common objective is a difficult task. The factionalization of the community, resulting in disbandment of refugee committees, is not uncommon in the region.

59. Fifth, difficulties may arise in responding to domestic violence issues and child abuse, as identification and follow-up may prove harder to undertake in an urban situation. UNHCR's Regional Office in Moscow has initiated a consultancy to assess the capacity of UNHCR and its partners in this area, to train them and to provide recommendations on how to cases can be better identified and followed up. This will include the training of refugee outreach workers.

60. Sixth, there are no Community Services Officer posts in any Eastern or Central European country; in the Russian Federation, there is one international staff member and a national UN Volunteer. Elsewhere, public information or programme staff with no specialist experience are expected to cover the community services sector.

Annex I :

Comments on the individual assistance programme in Moscow

The individual assistance policy and programme developed by UNHCR's Moscow office represent a sophisticated effort to come to terms with complex issues facing asylum seekers in Moscow. The proposed changes to the cash assistance regime should not be viewed primarily as cost cutting measures. Cuts to the assistance regime in 1999 were already quite deep, with cash assistance treated as a subsidy, rather than seen as basic assistance. Present efforts to develop a new approach are oriented more towards giving greater coherence and rationale for the distribution of available resources to individuals and families.

In particular, the new individual assistance programme tries to address the stark reality in which UNHCR Moscow operates. On one hand, UNHCR struggles to ensure that the government of the Russian Federation fully assumes responsibility for the protection and material survival of asylum seekers pending status determination or during a process of appeal, and endeavours not to create any parallel system.

On the other hand, however, the office feels obliged to fill the gap where the government is unable or unwilling to protect them and meet their material needs.

Community services, programme and protection staff have worked in close collaboration on the policy and new programme. The community services staff have a considerable amount of first-hand information about the situation of many asylum seekers and refugees, relatively frequent contact with them and with implementing partners, and a sound analysis of the problems and opportunities which exist.

On the basis of her knowledge of the asylum seeking communities, it is appropriate that the community services (CS) officer in Moscow has taken a leading role in the development of the new programme, as well as calling attention to its implications, risks and potential problems. The CS officer has also actively involved asylum seekers and refugees, as well as implementing partners, in developing and communicating the new policy.

The new approach emphasises local integration as *the* solution available to most asylum seekers and refugees. This is not a 'policy option' but a statement of reality, given the administrative backlog and slow pace of status determination procedures provided by the Russian Federation. Considering the limited opportunities for resettlement and the continuing dangers associated with voluntary repatriation, many asylum seekers face a prolonged state of limbo during which UNHCR appears unable to fully support them given the high cost of living in the Moscow area.

Positive aspects of the new approach/policy are seen to be as follows.

It addresses the need for a longer-term approach to planning and counselling. Several asylum-seekers and staff of implementing partners stressed the point that ‘waiting can make you sick!’; a lack of understanding of realistic options can increase both physical and social ‘vulnerability’. While many asylum-seekers who approach UNHCR ultimately hope for resettlement to the West, for most this is unlikely to happen. The policy places *planning for local integration*, however challenging that reality may be, as the main option available to those who do not see any possibility of voluntary repatriation.

Open acknowledgement of the low chances for resettlement in the West is important for the well-being of both asylum-seekers and those who are hired to counsel them about available options and opportunities. It places resources at the disposal of UNHCR towards facilitating the process of “local integration”, both for adults and children. In this context, the evaluation team would recommend that intensive Russian courses and vocational training also be opened to women (who may not be the heads of household but who could also benefit from language and other skills as a means to local integration), provided that sufficient resources can be identified.

The use of ‘Open Criteria’ for specific forms of support – i. e. for children’s education and adult training – also go in this direction and increase the perception of transparency in addressing the needs of the asylum-seeking population as a whole. This we see as a positive step, reducing the subjective and ‘policing’ role of social workers, and also the humiliation involved for refugees who no longer need to meet the criteria of ‘vulnerability’ to qualify for specific types of support.

The open criteria are likely to engender less mistrust between UNHCR and the asylum-seeking population, and therefore promote a greater ability to identify and address the real problems and difficulties. The policy is likely to introduce greater fairness in provision of assistance, circumventing the difficulties associated with means testing, and the tendency to push families to pretend to vulnerabilities they may not in fact be suffering.

Since the announcement of the policy, some husbands who had “disappeared” have returned, and with the provision of school kits, UNHCR can get a better understanding as to actual school attendance. The recent establishment of the refugee organisation, OPORA, is another example of the development of greater trust, co-operation and openness between UNHCR and the asylum-seeker population.

Counselling by implementing partners, which may at times have taken the form of interrogations, has greater chance to revert to providing genuine psycho-social support and ‘integration’ advice.

It is likely that a wider number of individuals and families will obtain some assistance.

The new policy reveals a keen awareness that some families will continue to require additional support – based on specific social or medical challenges. It leaves room for continued assistance in the case of special vulnerability, temporary illness, emergency situations, and temporary accommodation support. While the evaluation team feels that great care has been taken to envisage exceptional cases and special needs, it is nonetheless recommended that sufficient funds be set aside to offset any

other unforeseen consequences of the new approach, that should be maintained until a trial period has permitted adjustments to be implemented.

Some challenges of the new individual assistance programme are:

There is little financial assistance available for those who already speak fluent Russian and who are already skilled, but cannot find employment. It was pointed out to us that some elder (and possibly unwell) family members may feel pressured to attend Russian classes in order to benefit from the assistance, rather than to acquire the language skills themselves. Special attention should continue to be paid to creating opportunities for skilled asylum-seekers to find employment.

There are likely to be cases where those who speak some Russian and who manage to find a job (e.g. in the street markets) have to make a decision whether to take the Russian course and get a stipend from UNHCR (therefore give up the job to attend the course and subsequently become dependent on the assistance provided from the office) or continue to work and give up the possibility to get stipend from the office.

This may be a difficult choice to make. Perhaps the office could think of organising such a course at times convenient for those people who already work somewhere (e.g. by offering a night class). This will also increase the incentive of being transparent, if those who share the information with the office that they are working somewhere could still get some lesser level of support if they attend the night course.

Vocational training is meaningful where there are related opportunities to find employment. Some asylum-seekers felt that given the limited range of occupations in which they can find employment, and the fact that the right to work is linked to residence registration (which most asylum-seeker do not have) the usefulness of the training they received was questionable. This underlines the complexities in placing too high an emphasis on the idea of 'self-reliance' and the crucial importance of addressing the problem of residence registration, which is key to the realisation of basic social rights (see below). It also points up the need to link this programme to efforts to support and assist asylum seekers to find employment.

The cost of the programme remains largely unknown, as with the changed criteria, and the elimination of means tests, more people may come forward. This poses a challenge to programme planners. Presumably, if more people ask for training courses or kits than anticipated, some programme revision and cut-backs many will entail, unless additional resources can be found.

The success of the Individual Assistance Programme, is dependent on other initiatives and activities associated in working with this population, most of which have already been identified by CS and Programme staff.

Many staff are aware of the importance of developing relations with refugees such that community members can be mobilised to make efforts and advocate on their own behalf. The Community Services Officer is building a relationship of trust and empowering asylum-seekers and refugee leaders to develop their own approaches.

OPORA, Asylum-seekers Women's Committee, and ICHUMBI (St-Petersburg) are associations that should be cultivated for their potential to act as interlocutors between UNHCR and the asylum-seeker-refugee population, and to assist in dealing

with the challenges posed by 'local integration'. It is already envisaged and is strongly recommended that in time, such associations should become involved in developing and managing their own projects, such as in helping to identify job and housing opportunities for community members.

In addition to problems of police harassment and extortion to which visible minorities are particularly vulnerable in Moscow, the general problem of residence registration affects many new arrivals to the Moscow area. The housing crisis and 'dual market' (nominal or no rents for the vast majority of the population and extremely high rents for those who come from outside Moscow) poses a challenge that UNHCR is not in a position to address for its clientele. Implementing Partners and the new asylum-seeker/refugee associations may eventually help to identify ways for more people to obtain residence registration, and this should be encouraged.

The fact that the office registered asylum seekers who approached the office in early 1990's on a prima facie basis and that for this caseload, UNHCR appears to carry out the full RSD only when those socially and medically vulnerable cases are forwarded by IP Solidarity for resettlement processing, hampers the effort to determine who are the exact beneficiaries of the material assistance. Although the office seems to have introduced a more thorough interview and case analysis on each individual in recent years, the review of cases registered prior to the introduction of the status determination by the office, should be made as a priority, in order to reduce further confusion among the asylum seekers and Implementing Partners.

The asylum-seekers choose to remain in Moscow, despite the fact that Moscow is by most accounts the most expensive, dangerous, and overtly hostile (to asylum seekers and refugees) centre in the RF. This is likely because there are more opportunities to find work, to associate with other like families, and to be closer to agencies that can assist in obtaining passage to the West.

While UNHCR feels obliged to fill the gap where the government is unable or unwilling to protect and meet the asylum seekers' material needs, the alternative of encouraging asylum-seekers and refugees to seek such assistance through reception centres outside of Moscow, merits more consideration and concerted effort.

It is clear that even in St. Petersburg, more services are available and less difficulties and delays encountered in obtaining some kind of Government status review, and in getting residence registration. There may be additional benefits that can be obtained through the Red Cross's advantageous position in St. Petersburg, the extent to which they are able to obtain facilities at very low rents, for instance. We were also informed of other 'reception' centres and facilities outside of Moscow not currently being utilised.

UNHCR should consider setting up a closer co-operation with and some additional monitoring of the services provided through their implementing partner in St. Petersburg, the Red Cross. Services there appear to be under-utilised, compared to those in Moscow. It should be assessed by UNHCR whether or not the services provided in St. Petersburg are reaching the population of asylum seekers that need them most, and if not, how best to address this fact.

ANNEX I

UNHCR should carefully monitor the levels of utilisation, resistance met, changes in attitudes, changes in school attendance, problems and pressures encountered, and the like, associated with the implementation of the new programme. The programme should be properly evaluated next spring to determine whether it is better meeting the asylum-seeker/refugee needs and whether adjustments to the programme and policy are required.

Virginia Thomas, Janni Jansen and Naoko Obi