

History – 15-18 years

Suggested readings for the teacher



Displacement in the Commonwealth of Independent States

UNHCR publication for CIS Conference, May 1996

The full name of this conference (held in Geneva on 30-31 May 1996) is "Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighboring States." For the sake of brevity, it is referred to in these articles as the CIS Conference.

ARTICLES

[About this publication](#)

[Forced to move by war or circumstance](#)

The disintegration of the Soviet Union has given rise to the largest, most complex, involuntary movements of people since World War II. Some 9 million people have left their homes in CIS countries for a variety of reasons, several of them unique to the region.

[Punished peoples: the mass deportations of the 1940s](#)

Between 1936 and 1952, 3 million people were rounded up from their homes along the USSR's western borders and dumped thousands of miles away in Siberia and Central Asia. Fifty years later, some are still trying to get back.

[Central Asia on the move](#)

Central Asia is an astonishing ethnic mosaic, partly as a result of the deportations and other large influxes during the Soviet period. The region has experienced one civil war, and two smaller inter-ethnic conflicts. Because of these and other pressures, around one in 12 of the region's inhabitants has moved since 1989.

[Orphans of the USSR: the return of the Slavs](#)

When the Soviet Union broke up, some 34 million Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, no longer sure whether they were at home or abroad, began to feel insecure in the newly independent republics where they were residing. By 1996, over 3 million had returned to their ethnic homelands, creating severe economic strains at both ends.



[Conflicts in the Caucasus](#)

The Caucasus has experienced five major conflicts, creating more than 2 million refugees and internally displaced people. While most of the conflicts are relatively quiescent, none of them appears close to finding a lasting solution. Hundreds of thousands continue to live in temporary shelter.

[Ecological disasters: the human cost](#)

The USSR left behind numerous heavily contaminated or polluted industrial, agricultural and nuclear sites. The three worst hit areas --Chernobyl, the Aral Sea and the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site -- have already produced more than 700,000 ecological migrants, as well as very serious health concerns for those who remain.

[Transit migrants and trafficking](#)

Large numbers of illegal immigrants and transit migrants -- at least 450,000 in the Russian Federation alone -- present a completely new phenomenon for the CIS countries, and are potentially destabilizing. Traffickers exploit the situation by charging large sums to refugees and economic migrants desperate to reach the West.

[In legal limbo: asylum-seekers and statelessness](#)

Asylum-seekers from non-CIS countries are also by and large new to the region. At the time of independence, none of the CIS countries had suitable systems to cope with them according to international norms. Other groups, which have fallen into a similar legal vacuum, are at present effectively stateless.

[The CIS Conference on Refugees and Migrants](#)

The CIS Conference process is the first attempt by the international community to grapple comprehensively with the huge, unprecedentedly complex and destabilizing movements taking place in the countries of the CIS.

The CIS Conference on Refugees and Migrants

The CIS Conference process has pursued three main aims:

- To provide a reliable forum for the countries to discuss population displacement and refugee problems in a humanitarian and non-political way.
- To analyze all population movements in the region, and clarify the categories of concern.
- To devise a comprehensive strategy at national, regional and international levels to cope with existing and possible future forms of involuntary movement.

In December 1993, recognizing the scale of existing irregular mass movements and the potential for more, the General Assembly (Resolution 49/173) called on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to convene a regional conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighboring States.

Early in 1994, UNHCR began consultations with the governments of CIS countries, as well as with other interested countries and inter-governmental agencies, to prepare for the regional Conference which will be held in Geneva on 30-31 May 1996, some two years after the process began. The extraordinary range and unprecedentedly complex nature of the mass movements taking place warranted the expertise of other agencies, namely the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). In early 1995, the three organizations, which have different but in many ways complementary mandates, formed a joint Conference Secretariat to cooperate with governments in devising a comprehensive regional approach to address the problems of mass displacement in the region.

The comprehensive strategy is laid out in an integrated document, known as the Program of Action, which incorporates a set of principles and a range of related practical measures. The Program of Action, which is expected to be endorsed at the 30-31 May Conference, serves as a blueprint for the future management of all forms of voluntary and involuntary mass migration in the region. It contains curative elements aimed at existing problems, which were identified during the early stages of the process, and preventive measures aimed at forestalling further problems that could all too easily lead to yet more large-scale involuntary displacement.

Before the drafting of the conference document began in earnest in January 1996, the conference process had already passed through several important preparatory stages. The main goal of the preparatory process was to devise a framework for remedial and preventive action based on universally recognized principles, yet tailored in a more focused manner to the specificity of the CIS countries.



A Meeting of Experts, held in May 1995, had agreed on a number of key issues to be addressed during the Conference process. These included:

- Identifying the types of movement found in the region, including movements of refugees, internally displaced people, repatriants, formerly deported peoples, 'involuntarily relocating persons' (i.e., repatriants from conflict zones), illegal immigrants, stranded migrants and ecological migrants;
- Addressing the question of conflicting and confusing terminology, and agreeing on working definitions of the types of movements identified;
- Formulating strategies to better manage population flows in a humanitarian manner; in particular, strengthening such areas as legal protection, early warning, emergency preparedness, implementation, information sharing and dealings with minorities;
- Harmonizing the above strategies at national, regional and international levels and encouraging a shared commitment among the participating governments and the international community;
- Establishing an accountability structure to implement the strategies agreed upon by the Conference participants.

The first round of sub-regional meetings (which continued to identify and analyze the problems and issues) was held between July and September 1995 in Tbilisi, Ashgabat and Kyiv. Special areas of focus included emergency preparedness, early warning, management of migration, and return and reintegration assistance. A second round of sub-regional meetings was held between November 1995 and January 1996 in Tbilisi, Minsk and Ashgabat.

During this stage of the process, the participating countries identified a number of the most pressing causes and effects of mass population movements in the various regions and began formulating practical programs on a national, regional and international level as part of the drive to find solutions to the problems. They also worked towards a regional standardization of terminology, definitions and norms dealing with refugees, internal displacement and other types of related migration. The aim was to achieve a shared understanding of the problems with a common lexicon to describe these phenomena, avoiding politically charged terminology and adhering to existing international norms.

By the time the Second Meeting of Experts took place on 23-24 January 1996, concrete proposals were being incorporated into the Conference document and a Drafting Committee was set up involving some 30 governments. Drafting and redrafting continued at a considerable pace over the next three months leading up to the Preparatory Conference, which was scheduled to take place in the Belarus capital, Minsk, from 5 to 8 May. Simultaneously, a number of consultations were taking place with interested non-governmental organizations and academics specializing in the region, with the idea of feeding their expertise into the process.

The Program of Action prepared for adoption at the CIS Conference is based on recognition of the challenges, dangers and opportunities which the CIS region holds and represents a broad-ranging effort by the international community to help stabilize conditions, and contain or manage flows in a concerted and



comprehensive manner. It has been prepared by the participating countries on the basis of equality and in the spirit of burden-sharing, but based on the understanding that ultimately the success of this major internal exercise will depend to a great extent on the political will and commitment of the CIS countries themselves.

Key elements of the Program of Action

The Program of Action contains two over-arching sections (the Declaration and Principles), which deal with the underlying circumstances that lie behind the conference as well as the fundamental principles governing the actions outlined in the other five sections.

Declaration: The opening declaration states that the main causes of the involuntary population movements in the region are the current social and economic insecurity of the CIS countries and the manifestation, in some countries, of violence and to some extent a disregard for human rights and humanitarian law, as well as ecological disasters. It warns that massive, unmanaged population movements may undermine political and economic transformation in the CIS countries and could have far-reaching implications for international security and stability. It further states that the comprehensive strategy worked out during the conference process is grounded in universal human rights and internationally accepted principles relevant to the management of population movements and to the prevention of further large-scale involuntary displacement. While the strategy has been formulated specifically to apply to the CIS countries themselves, the other participating states are committed to supporting the implementation of the measures contained in the Program of Action. It calls for recognition of those problems in a spirit of international cooperation, solidarity and burden sharing.

Principles: The principles include commitments to uphold and implement important international and regional instruments relating to human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law. A number of crucial individual rights are listed, including freedom of movement and freedom to choose where you live in your own country; the rights of refugees and internally displaced people in accordance with international law; and the right to have a nationality. States agree to ensure that all people who were citizens of a previous state and are permanently residing on the territory of a successor state are granted citizenship. They also agree to adopt measures to prevent and reduce statelessness. The principles also contain a number of commitments to uphold and improve a wide range of minority rights. The rights of formerly deported peoples and repatriants to return to their ancestral home are also listed.

Institutional framework

This section of the Program of Action stresses the need to develop institutional capacity with significant input from a wide range of international actors possessing the necessary expertise. It covers the establishment or adaptation of national policies designed to manage a variety of different types of migratory movement, including forced, involuntary and illegal movements, as well as the adoption or



revision of the necessary legislation and establishment of the necessary administrative structures to make such policies workable.

Operational framework

This section deals with the underlying principles and actions necessary for providing emergency assistance or lasting solutions for various types of involuntarily displaced or relocating people. It also sets the parameters for the international assistance programs necessary to help CIS countries with limited experience and capacity to cope with large or complex situations. Special attention is paid to the different types of operational environment necessary for each of the various affected groups covered by the conference.

Prevention

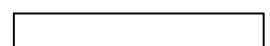
This section outlines a number of measures designed to defuse potentially dangerous social or political tensions that could lead to conflict and displacement, as well as enhance monitoring and early warning of such situations or events. Measures include the establishment of, or provision of effective support for, national institutions and legislation to enhance or maintain human rights in general, and minority rights in particular. Specific measures to increase confidence within and between different social, ethnic and religious groups are also outlined. The important role NGOs can play in this regard is stressed, as well as that of various specialized international and inter-governmental agencies and mechanisms. Guidelines are also included on how to maximize the effectiveness of the various international conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Cooperation

Cooperation is dealt with on various different levels: between different CIS countries, and between CIS countries and other interested or affected countries on matters such as border control and trafficking as well as the whole panoply of displacement, involuntary relocation, repatriation and integration (all of which can affect or be affected by several countries at once); cooperation between CIS countries and international organizations; and between NGOs and other independent actors.

Implementation and follow-up

Responsibility for implementing the Program of Action rests with the CIS countries. However, as and when international support is necessary, the other participating states are expected to provide it through bilateral or multilateral efforts. The three members of the Conference Secretariat also reiterate their full commitment to help the CIS countries implement the Program of Action. During the final run-in to the Conference, UNHCR and IOM began developing a three-to-four year joint strategy to guide their activities in the region up to the year 2000, focusing on the key elements contained in the Program of Action. Cooperation with other organizations and institutions (including international financial institutions) will be sought in appropriate areas and ways.



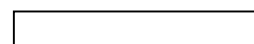
List of participating states (by April 1996)

CIS states

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Georgia
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Moldova
The Russian Federation
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Ukraine
Uzbekistan

Other states

Australia
Austria
Belgium
Bulgaria
Canada
The Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Holy See
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Islamic Republic of Iran
Italy
Japan
Latvia
Lithuania
Mongolia
The Netherlands
Norway
People's Republic of
China
Pakistan
Poland
Portugal
Romania
The Slovak Republic



Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
The United Kingdom
The United States

Forced to Move by War or Circumstance

Overview

When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, politicians and commentators in Western Europe began to worry out loud about the prospect of large numbers of migrants crossing from Central Europe and what was then still the Soviet Union into their own countries. These worries increased still further, despite major tightening of the borders, when the Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991. The massive movements westward did not materialize, and the outside world has since grown somewhat complacent about many of the problems facing the Soviet Union's successor states. In the meantime, largely unnoticed by people outside the region, movements of an astonishing scale and complexity have been taking place within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which comprises 12 of the 15 independent states that emerged from the ashes of the USSR.

9 million on the move

Since 1989, around 9 million people have moved within or between the countries of the CIS -- one in every 30 of the region's inhabitants. This figure, which is the product of research conducted as part of the process leading up to a major international conference taking place in Geneva on 30-31 May 1996, for the most part includes only people who have moved for involuntary reasons. It does not include internal migrants moving for purely economic reasons, nor other categories outside the scope of the CIS Conference, such as returning soldiers and people emigrating to non-CIS countries. The movements addressed by the conference are perhaps the largest, most complex, and potentially most destabilizing to have taken place in any single region of the world since the end of World War II. And they are continuing.

While some of the movements are of an all too familiar type (a total of some 2.3 million internally displaced people and around 700,000 refugees as a result of conflicts), others are unique: products of the special characteristics of the Soviet Union, and of the unexpected dissolution of a single state into 15 separate ones.

54-65 million find themselves abroad

In 1991, when the Soviet Union broke up, the total number of people who were living outside their 'home' republics or autonomous regions is estimated to have been somewhere between 54 and 65 million, or one-fifth of the total population. Of these, 34 million were Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians living in other



republics. For them, 'home' had been the Soviet Union, which suddenly no longer existed.

Many of them were faced with a very uncertain future. The republics where they were resident suddenly seemed less secure places to live -- nationalism was on the rise almost everywhere, and in many places living standards were dropping dramatically. In some countries, new language and citizenship laws placed them at a disadvantage, and some risked (and still risk) becoming stateless. When ethnic tensions flared up into all-out conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and major civil wars also broke out in the Caucasus and Tajikistan, the Slavs began to go 'home' in large numbers, particularly from Central Asia. However, in many cases it was to a home they had never seen, or had all but forgotten, and one where their economic prospects were, to say the least, extremely uncertain. By the beginning of 1996, some 3.3 million 'repatriants' had left the countries in which they were residing to return to their ancestral homeland. More seem likely to follow, although the rate of departure has finally begun to slow (see Orphans of the USSR).

The deported peoples

Another type of current movement unique to the CIS countries is the direct result of an extraordinary policy adopted, and ruthlessly executed, by Stalin more than half a century ago, the full details of which are only now becoming apparent as academics gain access to previously secret files in Moscow.

Between 1936 and 1952, more than 3 million people were forcibly removed from their homes, crammed into train-convoys of cattle wagons and relocated thousands of kilometers away in Siberia and Central Asia under what was known euphemistically as 'the special settlers regime.' Among them were eight entire ethnic 'nations,' totaling some 1.4 million people. Tens of thousands died during the journeys and upon arrival (see Punished Peoples).

Three of these entire nations -- the Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetians -- had still not been permitted to return to their ancestral homelands by the time the Soviet Union disintegrated. Although not permitted to return to the Volga, a total of 850,000 Soviet Germans have been helped to emigrate to Germany since 1992. In all, close to 1.4 million have gone to Germany since they were first allowed to leave the Soviet Union in 1961.

One of the other groups, the Meskhetians, became involved in ethnic conflict in Uzbekistan in 1989, and had to be evacuated by Soviet troops. At least 74,000 Meskhetians are now living as refugees in other CIS countries. Only 300 of them have managed to return to their original home republic, Georgia. The Crimean Tatars, who had also been deported en masse to Uzbekistan, began returning to Crimea spontaneously in 1988. Around half of them (250,000) have now arrived back there.

Numerous difficulties surround such groups who wish to return to their ancestral lands, and have either so far been unable to do so, or are in the process of doing



so. What are the duties and responsibilities of the successor states for acts committed by the Soviet state? How can they satisfy the legitimate wish of groups to return while avoiding social disruption caused by returns to areas that have been populated by others for half a century?

Refugees, IDPs and involuntarily relocating persons:	3,632,000(1)
Repatriants to country of ethnic origin:	3,296,000(1)
Return movements of formerly deported peoples:	1,184,000
Ecological migrants:	689,000
Illegal migrants:	580,000
Asylum-seekers/Refugees from non-CIS countries:	68,000
Total:	8,845,000(1)
(1)Overlap of 604,000 repatriants/involuntarily relocating persons is not included in overall total.	

Lethal environments

Another Soviet legacy causing considerable suffering and displacement in CIS countries is some of the USSR's nuclear, industrial and agricultural installations and practices, which have led to the flight of at least 700,000 ecological migrants. The three worst-hit areas, in terms of displacement, are the Aral Sea basin and the Chernobyl district (both of which include three countries) and the area around the former nuclear test site at Semipalatinsk in Kazakstan. Hundreds of other areas in CIS countries are affected by severe air pollution and chronic chemical and nuclear emissions, leakages and waste (see Ecological Disasters).

Unresolved wars

There have been seven major conflicts in CIS countries since 1988, when the long-smoldering problem of Nagorno-Karabakh (the predominantly Armenian enclave which Moscow had put under Azerbaijan's administration in the 1920s) set off a full-scale war between the two neighboring countries. Technically a civil war at the time, it subsequently became an international conflict after both countries became independent. The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan was followed by four more conflicts in the Caucasus: two in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), and two in the Russian Federation (North Ossetia and Chechnya) (see Conflicts in the Caucasus).

Moldova and Tajikistan have also experienced major conflicts, both of which broke out in 1992. All but about 8,000 of the 100,000 displaced from the Transdniestier

region of Moldova to other parts of the country and Ukraine have now returned. And, despite a continuing sporadic guerrilla war in the mountains, there has been something of a success in Tajikistan where a major international relief operation has assisted almost all the 600,000 people displaced inside the country, as well as 43,000 of the 60,000 refugees who fled to Afghanistan, to return home.

Yet by April 1996, even though serious fighting was confined to the Chechnya conflict, lasting solutions to the other six conflicts had not been found.

In addition to the conflict in Tajikistan, there have been two bouts of serious inter-ethnic fighting in Central Asia, both in the volatile Ferghana Valley which stretches from Uzbekistan into Kyrgyzstan. The first involved the Meskhetians in 1989, and the second took place a year later on the Kyrgyzstan side of the border.

The ethnic mosaic

The ethnic mosaic which CIS countries have inherited from the Soviet Union was vastly complicated by the deportations, labor camps and collectivization of the Stalin era, as well as by the encouragement of certain groups to move to other USSR republics for reasons of political control and economic development. It was also further complicated by frequent tinkering with borders and creation of enclaves.

As a result, the potential for inter-ethnic strife remains a deep concern for many of the CIS countries. An academic study commissioned by the International Boundaries Research Unit and completed in December 1991, just as the Soviet Union was dismantled, identified no fewer than 164 ethno-territorial disputes and claims within the USSR.

One in 12 Central Asians on the move

Some of the largest and most complex movements that have taken place over the past seven years have been in Central Asia. In all, some 4.2 million people have been moving within, between or from the five Central Asian republics -- an astounding one in 12 of the region's inhabitants in 1989, or in the case of Tajikistan, one in five of the country's population (see Central Asia on the Move).

The Russian Federation has seen the largest movements of any single country (although not in proportion to its size) with some 3.4 million moving to or within the country. Included in those numbers are some 450,000 illegal migrants, many of whom are thought to be trying to transit westward. The Russian Federation also has the largest number of asylum-seekers from non-CIS countries (42,000 in 1995).

Unique complexities

The complexity of the movements stems from the combination of three broad types of population flow, each of which is highly unusual in some respect. There



are pre-existing movements which have acquired a new dimension due to their transformation from internal to international (for example, repatriants and economic migrants); movements that are well-known to the international community, but new to CIS countries (such as refugees, internally displaced persons, illegal and transit migrants); and movements of which the international community has virtually no experience (the return of formerly deported peoples).

The massive scale of the population displacements have strained the limited resources of countries which lack experience and institutions to manage the sudden large-scale movements of people, a situation compounded by the fact that all the countries of the CIS are going through an extremely difficult period of transition.

Why a conference?

At the beginning of 1994, as a result of growing concern among CIS countries at the scale of movement that had already taken place since the demise of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation proposed to the U.N. General Assembly that there should be a global conference dedicated to refugees, displacement and migration issues.

By that time, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was already fully involved trying to help pick up the pieces from three hugely destructive conflicts in CIS countries (soon to be joined by a fourth, in the shape of the Chechnya conflict). As a result, in line with its general policy of promoting regional solutions to complicated refugee problems, UNHCR had also begun taking soundings about a major regional conference.

The two ideas gelled, and the CIS Conference on refugees and certain other forms of migrants was born. Given the complexity and overlapping nature of the movements that were occurring, and the obvious benefits of taking a holistic approach that would confront the causes as well as the results of involuntary movements, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the human rights and democratic institution-building arm of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) were obvious choices as partners to help lobby for and organize the conference. This unprecedented combination of organizations with different mandates meant that from the start the principal objectives were extremely wide-ranging and ambitious: the organizers and many of the participating governments were determined not to fall into the trap of arranging a glorious but ultimately inconsequential talking-shop, blazing briefly into life in the form of a major international conference before quickly fading into oblivion.

From the beginning, the organizers -- all three of which, to varying degrees, were already operational within the region -- stressed that the Conference should be seen as a major stepping stone in a continuous and open-ended process that would result not only in the establishment of important principles, but also in specific remedial and preventive actions on the ground. The Conference was not



an end in itself. The set of principles and plan of action that it would hopefully endorse would be geared to helping the governments in the region not just to manage their existing colossal population movements, but also to try and boost the chances of preventing more large-scale involuntary movements from taking place at all. People should be free to move if they wanted to, but not forced to move by conflicts that could be prevented, tensions that could be reduced, or by the absence, shortcomings or weaknesses of laws and institutions. In short, one of the prime motives behind the Conference was to increase stability in a potentially dangerously unstable region. Further instability within the CIS region, and the massive population movements that this could engender, on top of those that have already taken place, could clearly have much wider ramifications for global security.

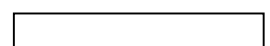
One of the first steps taken during the Conference process was a major data-gathering exercise. The rapid growth of shared information and experience that this engendered among the CIS countries themselves, as well as the other participating governments and the three international organizations that form the Conference Secretariat, provided the basic platform of knowledge that enabled the aims and precise format of the Conference process to begin taking firm shape.

(Further details of the progress and aims of the CIS Conference process are outlined in *The CIS Conference on Refugees and Migrants*.)

Punished peoples: the mass deportations of the 1940s

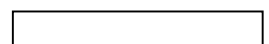
Several major voluntary and involuntary population movements taking place between CIS countries today, as well as a number of serious unresolved dilemmas, stem directly from an unparalleled string of forcible population transfers that occurred half a century ago, under the stewardship of Stalin's chief of secret police (NKVD), Lavrenti Beria.

Between 1936 and 1952, more than 3 million people were rounded up, for the most part along the Soviet Union's western borders, strictly on the basis of their 'foreign' origins or culture, and dumped thousands of kilometers away in eastern and central Siberia or in the Central Asian republics. In all, more than 20 major groups suffered in this way, including eight entire 'nations' who were removed from their ancestral homelands. Of these, one was non-Orthodox Christian (the Volga Germans), one Buddhist (the Kalmyks), and the other six Muslim (Chechens, Ingush, Karachai, Balkars, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetians). The Soviet Union's 2.5 million Jews were only saved from a similar fate by Stalin's death in March 1953.



The eight deported nations	
Volga Germans: Sept 1941	366,000
Karachai: Nov 1943	68,000
Kalmyks: Dec 1943	92,000
Chechens: Feb 1944	362,000
Ingush: Feb 1944	134,000
Balkars: Apr 1944	37,000
Crimean Tatars: May 1944	183,000
Meskhetians: Nov 1944	200,000
Subtotal:	1,442,000
Some other major groups forcibly transferred 1936-1952	
Poles: 1936 Ukraine > Kazakstan	60,000
Koreans: 1937 Vladivostok > Kazakstan / Uzbekistan	172,000
Poles/Jews: 1940-41 Ukraine & Belarus > N. Siberia	380,000
Other Soviet Germans: 1941-52 >Saratov, Ukraine > Central Asia	843,000
Finns (Leningrad region): 1942 Leningrad > Siberia	45,000
Other N. Caucasus groups: 1943-44 North Caucasus > Central Asia	8,000
Other Crimean groups: 1944 Crimea > Central Asia	45,000
Moldovans: 1949 Moldova > Central/East Siberia	36,000
Black Sea Greeks: 1949 Black Sea region > Kazakstan	36,000
Other Black Sea groups: 1949 Black Sea region > Kazakstan	22,000
Subtotal:	1,647,000
Grand Total:	3.1 million

Seven of the eight nationalities had been given their own (or shared) autonomous republics or regions by Lenin in the early 1920s (the exception being the Meskhetians). What Lenin gave, Stalin took away. By the end of World War II, all seven names had been wiped from the map. Some of the autonomous territories were renamed, others were carved up and given whole or in slices to neighboring republics. Names of towns and villages which contained traces of their founders and former occupants were changed. Buildings, books, places of worship, even



cemeteries, were destroyed in an attempt to erase all cultural, linguistic and historical traces of the forcibly transferred -- or 'deported' -- peoples.

In all, some 1.2 million Soviet Germans were forced onto train convoys of cattle wagons and shunted off to Siberia and Central Asia. Their ties with Germany, from where they had been encouraged to migrate 200 years earlier, were virtually non-existent. Nevertheless, with the German army advancing rapidly through Ukraine towards the Caucasus, the Soviet authorities decided the Germans were collectively guilty of spying for the enemy. The inhabitants of the autonomous Volga German Republic were among the first to go: between 3 and 21 September 1941, 366,000 Volga Germans were removed to Siberia on board 151 train convoys departing from 19 different stations.

The other seven entire 'nations,' totaling over 1 million people, were forced onto the cattle wagons between October 1943 and November 1944, under the watchful eye of Beria, who prowled up and down the Caucasus and Ukraine in his own special train. All but one of their homelands had been conquered by the German army in the latter part of 1942. By February 1943, they had all been recaptured by the Soviet army. The seven nations, along with many of the other smaller groups subsequently rooted out of western areas of the Soviet Union, were collectively branded -- despite an almost total lack of evidence -- as traitors and collaborators.

By now the practice of forcible transfer had acquired its own distorted and self-sustaining logic. Some 20,000 NKVD troops and huge quantities of rolling stock and other resources were diverted from the war effort in order to shift vast numbers of old people, women and children to distant lands quite unprepared to receive them. The entire population of Chechens and Ingush -- around 500,000 people in all -- were rounded up and packed on to 180 train convoys in the space of just over a week in February 1944. Three months later, new records were achieved when 183,000 Crimean Tatars, along with 8,000 other Crimeans, were crammed into long lines of waiting trains in the space of two days.

The consequences for the 'special settlers,' as they were euphemistically known, were devastating. Some families were given as little as five or ten minutes to pack up their belongings and food for the trip. No food was supplied. Tens of thousands are believed to have died during journeys which lasted up to two months. In some cases, bodies were left in the overcrowded cattle wagons for weeks on end. In others, they were thrown out beside the tracks.

Many of the transfers took place in winter. Those who survived the journey often found themselves with inadequate clothing, no shelter, and no means to support themselves in temperatures as low as -40C in Siberia or -20C on the Kazak steppes. In addition, their movement was restricted to a specified, very limited zone (which nearly always fell a few kilometers short of the nearest town). The penalty for straying was 15-20 years of hard labor in the Gulag camps. People found themselves doing totally unfamiliar work in utterly alien surroundings. Urban people were set to work in the mines and forests of Siberia. Nomadic herdsmen found themselves working in factories.



In 1948, the Supreme Soviet decreed that the 'special settlers' were definitively transferred, for ever. Stalin's death in 1953, and the subsequent execution of Beria, put an end to the collective condemnation and forced transfer of people simply because they belonged to a particular ethnic group. Under Khrushchev, the punitive restrictions imposed on the 3 million who had been transferred began to loosen. In September 1955, various restrictions on the rights of the Germans were annulled. Two months later, 5,000 Greeks expelled from Georgia in 1949 became the first group to be removed from the list of 'special settlers.'

In February 1956, five of the eight entire 'nations' (the Karachai, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush and Balkars) were named in Khrushchev's famous secret speech at the Communist Party Congress, in which he listed the forced transfers as one of the crimes committed by Stalin. Nevertheless, the 'special settlers' were not given the right to return to their ancestral homelands until 1957 (again, only the same five groups). The Chechens started returning almost immediately, and other groups soon followed. In most cases, their autonomous regions and republics were reinstated. However, none of the deported peoples were granted compensation for their losses, and land disputes became a common feature of some of the return movements (for example, in Chechnya).

The Crimean Tatars, Meskhetians and Volga Germans continued to be denied the right to return. However, under a special arrangement with the German government, Soviet Germans were allowed to emigrate to Germany, and given assistance to do so (travel costs, and various social benefits upon arrival). By the end of 1995, 1,376,000 had moved to Germany, where their continued arrival at the rate of some 200,000 per year has recently become a controversial political issue. A further 1.2 million are believed to be still living in CIS countries (mostly in Kazakstan, Kyrgystan and the Russian Federation).

Current return movements of forcibly deported peoples	
Germans: 1992 - Feb 1996	
Tajikistan > Germany	13,000
Kyrgystan > Germany	46,000
Kazakstan > Germany	480,000
Uzbekistan > Germany	16,000
Russian Fed. > Germany	275,000
Other CIS countries > Germany	8,000
Crimean Tatars	
Uzbekistan > Ukraine (Crimea)	164,000+
Russian Fed. > Ukraine (Crimea)	45,000+
Kazakstan > Ukraine (Crimea)	12,000+
Meskhetians	
Uzbekistan > Azerbaijan	46,000
Uzbekistan > Russian Fed.	25,000+



Note: All statistics on the original deportations, with the exception of the Meskhetians, are provided by Alain Blum of the Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques in Paris. Historical details were supplied by Blum or taken from Les Peuples deportés d'Union Soviétique by Jean-Jaques Marie. Population transfers (amounting to several million people) linked to collectivization and the Gulag labor camps, rather than the 'special settlers regime,' are not included. Further large-scale deportations took place from the Baltics, Moldova and the Ukraine from 1944-1953.

All the transferred peoples remain scarred to a greater or lesser degree by their terrible experiences in the 1940s. The legacy of such collective tragedy inevitably affects current relations within and between several of the states that emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union. It has also been a direct factor in the conflict in North Ossetia (which was fought between Ingush who had returned from Central Asia and North Ossetians who had settled on their lands); it is also part of the psychological framework underlying the conflict in Chechnya. The situation of two of the entire 'nations' forcibly removed from their homelands during World War II (the Crimean Tatars and Meskhetians) is still far from resolved, and has been a subject of special focus during the CIS Conference process (see box in Orphans of the USSR).

Central Asia on the Move

Central Asia has seen one intense and extremely destructive civil war in Tajikistan, and two much smaller but nevertheless frightening inter-ethnic conflicts in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Together with economic and environmental factors, fear of actual or potential violence in Central Asia has led to some of the largest movements of people in the CIS countries.

In all, well over 4.2 million people have moved within, from or to the five Central Asian republics since the late 1980s:

- 700,000 people were displaced during the Tajik civil war, including 60,000 who became refugees in Afghanistan.
- As many as 100,000 (mainly Meskhetians) fled or migrated as a result of fighting in the Ferghana Valley.
- At least 250,000 people have been forced to leave ecological disaster areas.
- 2 million have returned to their ethnic 'homeland' elsewhere in the CIS because of a mixture of economic and ethnic fears.

In addition, Kazakhstan has organized the return of some 70,000 Kazaks from Mongolia, Iran (where they had fled as refugees from the war in Afghanistan) and Turkey; and 560,000 ethnic Germans (out of a total 1.1 million in 1989) have left Central Asia for Germany since 1992, with German government assistance. Hundreds of thousands more people have moved between the Central Asian countries, or returned to them from other CIS countries. Extensive internal migration is also taking place, primarily for economic reasons. In Kyrgyzstan, for



example, in 1994 alone 116,000 moved from mainly rural areas in the south of the country to the more industrialized north.

Central Asia was the prime recipient of the numerous different ethnic groups that were forcibly relocated from western areas of the former Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s (see Punished Peoples). In addition, millions of Slavs -- Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians -- and others were encouraged by the Soviet state to settle in this important strategic outpost, for reasons of development and control. The result is an astonishing ethnic mosaic. Kazakstan, Kyrgystan and Turkmenistan each host more than 100 different ethnic groups or 'nationalities.' A single administrative region that includes the town of Osh, in western Kyrgystan, contains no fewer than 83 different nationalities.

All the Central Asian countries have been suffering major economic difficulties. Many Soviet-era industries -- often largely manned and managed by Slavs -- have had to scale down or shut down altogether. In some cases, entire towns have lost their jobs. In such situations, a move to Russia, or Ukraine, or Belarus seems to provide the only hope for the future. Environmental disasters such as the shrinking of the Aral Sea and the polluted Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site (both of which had a high proportion of Slavic inhabitants) also act as push factors. Competition over dwindling jobs and resources has already played a significant role in the two smaller ethnic conflicts to hit the region.

The USSR was still in existence when the first two serious outbreaks of violence occurred in the Ferghana Valley, a broad, densely populated, industrialized plain that stretches across the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. In June 1989, Soviet troops had to evacuate 74,000 Meskhetians from Uzbekistan's portion of Ferghana, after ten days of fierce street battles had left 100 dead. Several thousand more Meskhetians and members of other minorities left after the fighting was over. Almost exactly a year later, several hundred people were killed when fighting broke out between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz just across the border in the Osh region of Kyrgystan.

In May 1992, only nine months after independence, Tajikistan collapsed into a short but brutal civil war that killed at least 20,000 people. As well as causing massive displacement in its own right, the Tajik conflict has played a significant role in other forms of migratory movement. These included the exodus of several minorities not directly involved in the fighting (which was on the whole an inter-Tajik affair), firstly out of fear that they might get involved, and secondly as a result of the dire state of the economy which, more than three years after the main war ended, shows scant sign of improvement.

By the end of 1995, nearly all the 600,000 internally displaced Tajiks, and 43,000 of the 60,000 refugees in Afghanistan, had returned to their homes (the only major successful repatriation to have taken place in a CIS country). UNHCR mounted an intensive monitoring operation in returnee areas and rebuilt 18,000 houses destroyed in the war. IOM and OSCE have also been actively involved inside Tajikistan. Unfortunately, continued fighting in the eastern mountainous part of the country and along the frontier with Afghanistan, as well as a high level

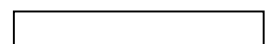


of violent crime in the capital, Dushanbe, have helped cripple economic recovery. A significant proportion of the population continues to live on the brink, with frequent shortages of food and an almost total lack of other resources.

The Tajik civil war and the outbreaks of violence in the Ferghana Valley had a major psychological impact throughout Central Asia, heightening the fears of minorities and -- on a more positive note -- alerting all the governments in the region to the importance of taking action to soothe ethnic tensions and anxieties before they spiral out of control, fuelling further major destabilizing outflows.

By the beginning of 1996, in the five Central Asian Republics, a total of 1.7 million Russians, 161,000 Ukrainians and 29,000 Belarusians had sold many of their possessions and hauled the rest in huge bundles onto the Moscow or St. Petersburg Express. By 1995, with no new conflicts occurring for three years, and partly reassured by measures taken by the authorities, the numbers leaving had started to drop, and some of those who had left earlier were starting to return. However, the cost of the brain drain from the region has already been immense.

Refugees and IDPs	
Tajikistan > Tajikistan	600,000
Tajikistan > Afghanistan	60,000
Russian Fed. (Chechnya) > Kazakstan	6,000
Afghanistan > Uzbekistan	8,000
Tajikistan > Kyrgystan	13,000
Involuntarily relocating persons/repatriants	
Tajikistan > Turkmenistan	45,000
Tajikistan > Russian Fed	300,000
Tajikistan > Kyrgystan	17,000
Tajikistan > Ukraine	30,000
Tajikistan > Uzbekistan	30,000
Tajikistan > Belarus	10,000
Formerly deported peoples fleeing violence - Meskhetians	
Uzbekistan > Azerbaijan	46,000
Uzbekistan > Russian Fed.	25,000+
Returning formerly deported peoples	
Uzbekistan > Ukraine (Crimea)	164,000+
Uzbekistan > Germany	16,000
Kazakstan > Germany	480,000
Kyrgystan > Germany	46,000
Tajikistan > Germany	13,000
Repatriants	
Kazakstan > Russian Fed.	614,000
Kyrgystan > Russian Fed.	296,000
Uzbekistan > Russian Fed.	400,000



Turkmenistan > Russian Fed.	100,000+
Mongolia > Kazakstan	60,000
CIS countries > Kazakstan	70,000
Iran > Kazakstan	9,000
Ecological migrants	
Aral Sea > Kazakstan	30,000
Aral Sea > CIS	13,000
Aral Sea > Uzbekistan/CIS	50,000+
Semipalatinsk > Kazakstan	45,000
Semipalatinsk > CIS	116,000
Kyrgystan > elsewhere in Kyrgystan	17,000

Orphans of the USSR: the return of the Slavs

When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, dozens of diasporas were created overnight. Estimates of the total number of people who found themselves living outside their 'home' republics or autonomous regions range from 54 to 65 million - one-fifth of the population of the former Soviet Union. Of these, some 34 million belonged to the three main 'Slavic' nationalities -- Russians (over 25 million), Ukrainians (close to 7 million) and Belarusians (over 2 million). For all of them, in a sense, 'home' had suddenly become abroad.

The five new Central Asian states between them housed 11 million Slavs. The three Caucasian states (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) contained some 900,000. The situation of Slavs living in the other republics quickly became one of the most sensitive political issues in the region, and still is.

Many Soviet citizens, especially the Slavs, had grown into the habit of feeling at home anywhere within the Soviet Union's frontiers. It was, after all, a single country with an all-powerful center controlling an intricately linked command economy. Between 1930 and 1970, millions of Slavs settled in other parts of the Soviet Union in search of better pay, decent housing and a higher social and professional status. In many cases, they were strongly encouraged to move by the Soviet authorities, who, in addition to the general political aim of strengthening control and cohesion throughout the country, also wished to develop underdeveloped areas and boost agricultural and industrial production.

In 1989, Russians were the largest or second-largest minority in all but one of the other republics. In Kazakstan, there were almost as many Russians as there were Kazaks (6.2 million and 6.5 million respectively). In several republics, especially in Central Asia, Slavs dominated the professional elite. By and large, they felt comfortable: politically and culturally dominant, economically secure, and at home. All these sentiments were severely undermined when the Soviet state that had nurtured them suddenly disintegrated.



The great majority of Slavs -- and most of the other minorities -- were plunged into a state of confusion and uncertainty. Very few had ever learned the local language. They had never needed to -- Russian was the lingua franca for the whole of the former Soviet Union, and particularly the cities where most Slavs lived. By the early 1990s, in all the newly independent states, the local language had in practice become the new official state language. Street signs were replaced. Schools and universities switched to using the local language. In some cases, knowledge of the local language became a job requirement. Local culture was vigorously promoted.

Many of the republics shed their Soviet coating with amazing speed. Fear of loss of livelihood, or at least of diminished living standards, became one of the major factors encouraging the newly-metamorphosed 'foreigners' to pack up and go.

The second major factor, the one which in some areas turned anxiety into serious panic, was a rise in inter-ethnic tensions. Frictions had first begun to claw their way out of the Soviet cocoon in the 1980s, when inter-ethnic riots took place in several republics and -- in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan -- a full-blown war broke out. At the same time, nationalist sentiments were on the rise throughout the Soviet Union's constituent republics. Without the support of the powerful center, Slavs suddenly felt exposed and began to fear for their physical security.

Since the collapse of the USSR, according to the Russian authorities, some 3 million people have moved from other republics to the Russian Federation. The majority of them are Russian-speakers. Although Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian civilians have not been directly caught up in any of the conflicts in the other CIS countries, the great majority of those who have returned to their historical homeland have come from areas where fighting has taken place or where ethnic tensions are perceived to exist.

The Central Asian republics -- which have suffered severe economic difficulties and witnessed a major conflict in Tajikistan, and two other serious inter-ethnic clashes -- have experienced large exoduses of Slavs. In total, more than 1.9 million have left since 1989, in the belief that they have a greater chance of finding a more secure future in their historical homeland (see Central Asia on the Move). Similarly, most of the much smaller number of Slavs who were living in the conflict-ridden Caucasian republics have also left, either to avoid the fighting or for economic reasons.

By 1995, however, a counter movement was also starting to emerge, even as the exodus continued. Increasing numbers of Slavs and other recent emigrants -- even a handful of the Germans who had been assisted to move to Germany -- have begun returning to the republics which they left only a year or two ago. Many of those who move, particularly those who have few close relatives in their historical 'homeland,' have great difficulty finding work in depressed labor markets. They also often encounter hostility from the local population in the places where they settle. Having left Central Asia or the Caucasus because they no longer felt at home there, some emigrants then find they feel even less at home in



Russia, Ukraine or Belarus. For some, the dilemma -- Where does their best hope for the future lie? Where do they feel least foreign? -- is particularly poignant. Unlike many smaller ethnic minorities, they do not even share a common identity with Slavs leaving other republics. They are truly orphans of the USSR.

CIS Countries	Departures of Russians	Departures of Ukrainians	Departures of Belarusians	Date
Armenia	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
Azerbaijan(1)	169,000	15,000	3,000	(1989-95)
Belarus	50,000	15,000	--	(1991-95)
Georgia	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
Kazakhstan	614,000	82,000	16,000	
Kyrgyzstan	296,000	39,000	3,000	(1989-95)
Moldova	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
Russian Federation	--	n.s.	n.s.	
Tajikistan(1)	300,000	30,000	10,000	(1991-95)
Turkmenistan	100,000	n.s.	n.s.	(1993-95)
Ukraine	(2)	--	(2)	
Uzbekistan	400,000(3)	n.s.	n.s.	(1991)
(1) Involuntarily relocating persons/repatriants from conflict zones n.s. = no statistics available				

(2) 276,000 people left for other CIS States in 1992

(3) estimate

Note: All statistics concerning repatriants (except Ukraine) are gathered from countries of former residence rather than from countries of return.

Many of the republics realized early on that the draining away of so many of their skilled professionals was extremely damaging to their economies and, to varying degrees, they have been trying to encourage the remaining Slavs and other nervous minorities to stay. For example, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have allowed people originating from other republics to hold dual citizenship, and in March 1996, Kyrgyzstan's parliament passed a proposal to make Russian an official language. The Kyrgyz government has also announced plans to introduce a new passport, in which mention of the holder's ethnic origin will no longer be mandatory.

The continuing struggle of the "deported peoples"

Two of the entire nations forcibly relocated by Stalin to Central Asia in the 1940s are still in the process of trying to return to their original homelands fifty years later. Whereas the Crimean Tatars have made some progress, the Meskhetians are not only still unable to return, but have also suffered a second involuntary displacement -- this time as a result of inter-ethnic violence rather than the policy of the state.

The Crimean Tatars: halfway home

The charge of treason against the Crimean Tatars was not formally lifted until 1967. Even then, they were not permitted to return to Crimea, despite conducting a long and concerted campaign to have their right to return recognized. In 1988, a small number of Crimean Tatars managed to re-enter Crimea and take possession of unoccupied pieces of land. In 1990, they began flooding back. By 1996, about half the Crimean Tatars (some 250,000) had returned. In the process, they have aroused hostility among other groups living on the politically sensitive peninsula, and are themselves leading a marginal, unregularized and poverty-stricken existence. The situation is further complicated by the possibility that many of the 250,000 Crimean Tatars remaining in Central Asia may also try to return in the near future.

The Meskhetians: still a long way to go

Even though the German army never even reached their home region in southwest Georgia, 200,000 Meskhetians (including some small neighboring groups) were forcibly relocated to Central Asia in November 1944. In 1968, they were the last



group to be cleared of treason (of which they had never even been formally accused in the first place). To this day, only 300 have managed to return to Georgia and stay there, mainly because of local hostility. Several thousand migrated to Azerbaijan after 1956, since it was one step closer to home. Of the remainder, the majority (106,000) lived in Uzbekistan until June 1989, when fighting broke out between Meskhetians and Uzbeks in a market place in the volatile Ferghana Valley. After two weeks of fighting and around 100 deaths, the situation became so bad that 74,000 Meskhetians were evacuated by troops sent by Moscow. The majority (around 44,000) went to Azerbaijan, which has granted them refugee status. Other groups went to the Russian Federation, Kazakstan and Kyrgystan. More Meskhetians left Uzbekistan when the Soviet Union was disbanded in 1991. Their situation remains extremely difficult, and their future uncertain.

Conflicts in the Caucasus

When the long-smoldering problem of Nagorno-Karabakh flared up in 1988, it provided a first indication of the many ethnic conflicts to come. This mountain enclave, mostly inhabited by people of Armenian language and origin, had been placed under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction in the 1920s, and was entirely surrounded by villages populated by Azeris. The ethnic strife that erupted there as the Soviet Union broke apart phased quickly into open warfare. Over a million people were forced to flee -- from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia; from Armenia to Azerbaijan; and from Armenian-occupied sectors of Azerbaijan to other Azeri villages. The colossal scale, and wide-ranging implications, of the nationalities issues that had frozen into quiescence under Soviet rule were now made evident in the world's headlines, along with the suffering, loss and displacement they would cause.

Although the Soviet Union was populated with dozens of nationalities, it was in the Caucasus that the mosaic of intermingled ethnic groups has been most problematic. The first post-Soviet outbreak of ethnic violence to occur on the territory of the Russian Federation itself was in the North Caucasus. In late October 1992, tens of thousands of Ingush were driven out of the disputed Prigorodny district of North Ossetia by Ossetians. (Prior to their deportation by Stalin in 1944, the area had belonged to the Ingush.) The conflict in Chechnya that broke out in December 1994, and which continues to rage, has also placed great strain on neighboring areas of the Russian Federation. In all, some 490,000 people have fled to Ingushetia, Daghestan, North Ossetia and Russia, as well as within Chechnya itself. Many returned during quieter periods, but may well have subsequently been displaced a second time.

But it is in the South Caucasus that the mosaic of peoples has shattered most decisively. In Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, up to 1.5 million people have fled from their homes as a result of ethnic fighting. In Georgia, conflict broke out in 1991 between South Ossetian secessionists and the central Georgian authorities. The following year more fighting erupted with Abkhaz secessionists. Overall, in a



country that was once one of the most prosperous republics of the Soviet Union, some 300,000 people have by now been displaced. Another 120,000 people have left for the Russian Federation (though not all as a direct result of conflict).

The enormous scale of displacement, in a region reeling from war damage and the economic after-effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, has hit the Caucasus hard. The region's slumping economies face declining output, rising unemployment, damaged infrastructure, currency depreciation, and the near-collapse of government social welfare programs, along with a swelling population.

IDPs	
Armenia / Azerbaijan	
Nagorno-Karabakh > Azerbaijan	684,000
Armenia > Armenia	72,000
Georgia	
Abkhazia > Georgia	273,000
S. Ossetia > Georgia	14,000
Russian Federation	
Chechnya > Russian Federation	487,000
N. Ossetia > Ingushetia	25,000
Refugees	
Armenia > Azerbaijan	185,000
Azerbaijan > Armenia	299,000
Uzbekistan > Azerbaijan (Meskhetians)	46,000
Georgia > Armenia	5,000
Georgia > Russian Fed. (refugees / repatriants)	119,000
Russian Federation	
Chechnya > Kazakstan	6,000
Chechnya > Belarus	5,000
Returnees	
Armenia > Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	35,000
Azerbaijan > Azerbaijan (Fizuli)	25,000

Problems of refugees and IDPs in the Caucasus are highly interconnected. The displacement of South Ossetian refugees from Georgia to North Ossetia has impacted on the Ingush-North Ossetian conflict, which drove people out to Ingushetia. Ingushetia has also been badly affected by the conflict in Chechnya (Russian Federation). Displacement from Chechnya also impacts on Daghestan, which has a border with Azerbaijan. One in eight people in Azerbaijan has been

forcibly displaced, most as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. In addition, however, Azerbaijan shelters tens of thousands of Muslim Meskhetians, who were deported under Stalin from Georgia to Central Asia, and who have made their way to Azerbaijan, 46,000 of them as a result of ethnic fighting in Uzbekistan; many wish to return to Georgia, but have so far been unable to do so.

With the exception of Chechnya, the other Caucasian conflicts have recently been relatively quiet. However, solutions to the conflicts and displacement have been blocked on all fronts by a failure to make political progress. In the case of the 270,000 displaced people from Abkhazia, efforts to organize repatriation have stalled, after the first 311 returnees, who went back in October 1994, encountered extremely serious security problems, including murder. Despite UN-sponsored proximity talks, the Abkhaz situation remains tense, and there is no consensus on a meaningful timetable for repatriation. Discussions on a solution to the South Ossetia conflict, and a possible return of the refugees (who fled to North Ossetia) and IDPs (who fled elsewhere in Georgia) are also blocked. At the southern end of the Caucasus, some 25,000 Azeri IDPs have managed to return to their homes in the Fizuli area, and 35,000 inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh have returned there from Armenia. However, to date, there has been insufficient political progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute to allow a serious discussion of the question of refugees and return.

Ecological disasters: The human cost

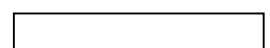
In all, throughout the CIS countries, around 300 areas have been identified where environmental pollution is thought to cause acute dangers to human life. A total of some 4 million square kilometers have been badly affected by nuclear, industrial and agricultural installations and practices adopted during the Soviet era.

The nuclear-weapons program involved 47 underground nuclear testing sites, and at least 20 major atomic waste disposal sites, several of which are already emitting radioactive materials into surrounding areas.

Dozens of towns, and several major cities, are extremely badly affected by industrial pollution.

Large areas of Central Asia have suffered irreparable damage from intensive farming and irrigation practices adopted in the 1960s, when Soviet central planners turned the region into a cotton monoculture in order to supply the clothing industry further north.

Originally, only the Chernobyl and Aral Sea regions were classified as 'very critical.' Recently, another 18 regions have been added to the list, including the Black Sea shore (nuclear power station effluent, oil sludge, nuclear waste); the area around Lake Baikal (industrial and agricultural pollution); areas of Moldova and parts of the North Caucasus (pesticides). A number of major industrial regions



in northern Siberia are heavily polluted, including the sprawling mining and metallurgical complex at Norilsk (population 300,000), site of one of the largest of Stalin's labor camps and the world's biggest producer of copper, cobalt and nickel. In Norilsk, the snow is black: the most visible effect of the huge quantities of toxic industrial waste and atmospheric emissions.

Ecological migrants	
Major displacements caused by ecological disasters	
Chernobyl	
Ukraine:	150,000
Belarus:	150,000
Russian Federation:	75,000
Aral Sea	
Kazakstan:	42,000
Uzbekistan:	n.d.
Turkmenistan:	n.d.
Semipalatinsk	
Kazakstan:	160,000
Russian Federation:	n.d.
n.d. = no data available	

In addition to the social strains created by population movements from ecological disaster areas, and the serious health risks, there is concern that in polluted regions where different ethnic groups live in close proximity, competition for increasingly limited clean water supplies could lead to conflict.

Chernobyl

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant explosion took place on 26 April 1986. Ten years later, the full cost of the world's worst nuclear accident is still far from clear. The Ukrainian Government and G-7 countries are still discussing the cost of closing down the plant (parts of which are still functioning) and repairing the cracked concrete sarcophagus covering the destroyed reactor. As many as 9 million people living in Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation may have been directly or indirectly affected. Incidence of thyroid cancer and some other diseases are on the increase. However, it will be many years before the full impact on health is known. In the meantime, millions of people live with the constant, debilitating fear that they, or their children, may be harboring an invisible, slowly maturing agent that could, at any moment, manifest itself in the form of a fatal illness. Radionuclides are leaking from the sarcophagus into the water table and the River Dnieper, and via the Dnieper into the Black Sea.

At least 375,000 people had to leave their homes in the immediate aftermath of the accident. Many from the outlying affected areas, where the contamination levels have dropped, have since gone back. However, those who lived within a 30-kilometer radius of Chernobyl will never be able to return home.

The Aral Sea

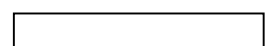
The Aral Sea has lost as much as three-quarters of its volume as a result of a huge canal system built in the 1960s to divert water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers into the expanded cottonfields of Central Asia; 35,000 square kilometers of what was once sea is now highly saline and polluted land. The salinity of the remaining, rapidly diminishing sea has quadrupled. Fish stocks are virtually extinct in the sea itself and drastically reduced in the river deltas. Major fishing towns now find themselves as much as 100 kilometers from the coast.

The Aral Sea and much of the surrounding area are also affected by chronic pollution caused by the cotton-crop fertilizers, pesticides and industrial waste which seep into the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. The destructive salts and toxic chemicals extend far beyond the original sea shore, as the result of a dramatic rise in the water table caused by the sieve-like irrigation canals, and of severe windstorms that each year sweep millions of tonnes of salt-dust from the dried-up lake bed across the rest of Central Asia. Large swathes of once-productive farmland lie fallow.

An estimated 2.5 million to 3 million people live in the worst affected areas of Kazakstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Major health problems have been reported, including a steep increase in infant mortality. The total number displaced in all three affected countries is not known, but probably exceeds 100,000. So far, in Kazakstan alone, at least 42,000 people have moved from the Aral Sea either further inside Kazakstan or to other CIS countries. Continued deterioration of the social, economic and environmental conditions in this ethnically complex region seems likely to force further internal and external migration.

Semipalatinsk

The Semipalatinsk region in northern Kazakstan hosted one of the Soviet Union's largest nuclear missile testing-sites. Some of the tests were carried out above ground. Close to 200,000 people are believed to have been directly exposed to radiation before testing was halted in 1963. More than 45,000 people have already moved from the Semipalatinsk region to safer areas of Kazakstan since independence. Another 116,000 people have left for other CIS countries. The neighboring Altaiskii region in the Russian Federation has also been badly affected.



Transit migrants and trafficking

Transit migrants: a new phenomenon

The collapse of the USSR, and the subsequent liberalization of CIS societies, led to a dramatic increase in migratory movements, both within and from outside the region. A substantial number of people began using CIS countries as a stepping stone to the West -- something no one would have even considered doing a decade ago.

The lack of agreement between CIS countries on matters such as visas and management of joint borders, coupled with drastically weakened control of borders with several non-CIS countries, has meant that CIS countries are now relatively easy to access -- and therefore attractive to transit migrants.

During the early 1990s, migrants from as far afield as Africa and Southeast Asia, and particularly from China, Afghanistan and Iraq, began arriving in CIS countries, hoping to proceed from there to a new life in Western Europe or North America. Their reasons for moving are varied:

- Some are fleeing war, persecution or ethnic tensions in their home countries, and qualify as refugees
- Some are migrating for economic reasons
- Some are searching for a better education and future for their children
- Some move for a combination of different reasons

At the same time that entering CIS countries has become easier, crossing into Western Europe has become more difficult. As a result, many would-be transit migrants find themselves trapped in the CIS region or in Central Europe, creating a problem for their hosts, who are unused to such a situation, and ill-equipped to deal with it. The migrants themselves suffer. Genuine refugees, who run up against the authorities in a country that still lacks a system for determining refugee status, risk being pushed back to their home countries, where they could be in danger. Economic migrants may spend years, and all their life savings, only to end up in a worse situation than they were in to begin with. Migrants who fall into the hands of traffickers (see below) have been known to lose first of all their money and then their lives.

IOM studies suggest that transit migrants are predominantly young (under 30 years old) and from urban areas of their home countries. Most of them are educated. Many of those coming from other CIS countries had a dependable source of subsistence in their home country: full-time employment, contract work or their own business. A lack of accurate information plays a key role in the decision to migrate. Before they set out (on what, for many, is an epic and fruitless journey), most transit migrants have an unrealistic vision of conditions in the countries where they are aiming to live and of the hardships of the voyage.

The human trade: trafficking in migrants



As a result of increasing numbers of would-be migrants, restricted immigration in most developed countries and the potential for significant profit, trafficking in migrants has become a 'high gain, low risk' venture. Legal sanctions against traffickers in many countries are non-existent, light or difficult to apply. Not surprisingly, organized crime syndicates which traditionally dealt in arms or drugs are finding the trade in human cargo increasingly attractive. In the CIS countries, the problem is comparatively new, but it is growing at an alarming speed as smugglers benefit from relatively weak border controls and inexpensive yet comprehensive transport routes. These factors are being exploited as migration controls tighten along other traditional trafficking routes.

Two major trafficking trends can be identified in the CIS region. One is the use of the CIS and neighboring countries as a transit zone for trafficked migrants bound for the West. Local and international smuggling syndicates provide trafficking services mostly to migrants -- including both economic migrants and genuine refugees -- from Africa and South and East Asia. Generally, they are bound for Western Europe and North America. The numbers are staggering: in Moscow alone, by some estimates, up to 250,000 Asians, mainly Chinese and Sri Lankan Tamils, are waiting for traffickers to arrange their travel to the U.S. The routes used to smuggle these migrants are increasing in volume and complexity, and can include several modes of transport, depending on the country of origin and of final destination. For example, Chinese migrants often travel by air via Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok and Moscow. From there, they fly to a western European destination or to the U.S. via London or Cuba, Nicaragua and Panama. Other Asian, African and Arab migrants travel by land through the Baltic States and then by boat to Scandinavia, with possible onward travel to North America. Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus are also affected by trafficking as migrants traverse these countries in an attempt to reach Western Europe. Trafficked migrants often have to endure overcrowding and insufficient food and water during long journeys, which on several tragic occasions have led to multiple deaths. Although it is impossible to accurately assess the number of lives lost in this way, it may be as many as several hundred a year.

A second major trend that is particularly exploitative and abusive is the trafficking of women from the CIS countries themselves to the West for prostitution. In search of work, and unable to migrate legally to the West, it is believed that thousands of such women have been recruited by agents or syndicates to work as hostesses or 'entertainers,' only to find themselves forced into prostitution in Western Europe.

As is the case with all countries affected by trafficking in migrants, the phenomenon potentially poses a grave threat to the security and welfare of the CIS countries. The financial gain involved in this expanding business is a potential source of corruption for those involved in the migration process, be they airline employees, border guards or other government officials. The criminal element that is linked to trafficking also undermines state security. In order to combat the illicit

activity of trafficking in migrants, strengthened national measures and closer international cooperation must be priorities for all nations.

In legal limbo: asylum-seekers and statelessness

Refugees and asylum-seekers

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of armed conflicts and ethnic clashes in several CIS countries have resulted in forced population displacements (including refugees and internally displaced people) that are unprecedented -- both in terms of the number of people affected and the complexity of the issues.

In addition, all CIS countries are confronted with the new challenge of coping with the arrival of asylum-seekers from non-CIS countries (in particular Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Ethiopia, Angola and Zaire). Afghans -- as many as 200,000 of whom are estimated to be living in CIS countries -- constitute the largest group of non-CIS asylum-seekers.

The refugee population in the CIS region has a number of unusual features, linked to the sudden and dramatic change of identity of the state in which they are living. They include a large group of 'refugees sur place' -- people who arrived in the USSR either by choice, or as a result of bilateral agreements, and were subsequently stranded in the successor states as a result of changes within their own country, or in the relationship between their home country and their newly metamorphosed host country. Examples of refugees sur place include former students from countries that were within the Soviet sphere of influence, children of communist Afghan officials (including many orphans) and North Korean timber workers.

As of mid-April, only four CIS countries had acceded to the 1951 Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (with a fifth, Kyrgyzstan, on the verge of doing so). Only four have adopted sound national legislation on refugees. However, even for these states, the implementation of international obligations deriving from accession to the 1951 Convention and/or the adoption of national refugee legislation poses a serious problem: as yet, none of the countries possesses sufficient institutional capacity to fully translate the national and international laws into consistent everyday practice.

The consequence of this absence of sound legislation, or its imperfect implementation, is that, in almost all CIS countries (with the possible exception of Tajikistan), non-CIS asylum-seekers do not have access to a refugee status determination procedure, do not enjoy the protection of their asylum country, and have no legal status nor any social or economic rights.

CIS refugees have in general found protection in their country of nationality (for



instance ethnic Armenians from Azerbaijan moving to Armenia), and governments are in the process of identifying durable solutions for each group. However, in many CIS countries, existing regulations that restrict freedom of movement and choice of place of residence constitute a major obstacle to the successful local integration of refugees and IDPs from within the CIS region, as well as refugees from non-CIS countries.

Statelessness

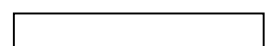
In December 1991, Soviet citizenship ceased to exist, leaving 287 million people in need of a new identity. One of the primary tasks of the newly independent states has been to define precisely who their citizens are, and to establish new rules for the granting of citizenship.

CIS countries have, broadly speaking, gone about this in two different ways. Several governments (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia and to some extent Moldova) have chosen the so-called 'zero option,' according to which all those who were permanent residents when the new law entered into force were counted as citizens. Some other governments (including most of the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan) have employed the concept of nationality used by the former USSR, and only granted citizenship to those people who had been considered as nationals before independence.

Given the different criteria used by the successor states of the USSR for the constitution of their citizenry and the granting of citizenship -- criteria that are sometimes conflicting or contradictory -- some groups of people have been left out and are, as a result, effectively stateless. This is the current position facing some of the formerly deported peoples, for example some Meskhetians and Crimean Tatars, who had not managed to return to their country of origin before the Soviet Union dissolved.

It is also the case for certain groups living in countries where the criterion of the previous nationality has been used: as they were not considered part of the national group, they have not been granted the citizenship of the successor state. If their state of ancestral origin belongs to the 'zero option' group, and they were not permanent residents at the time of entry into force of the citizenship law, they fail to qualify for citizenship there as well. Some Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians living in Central Asia are among those who fall into this category.

Statelessness can result in displacement, but only when it is combined with other factors (such as conflict, a rise in inter-ethnic tensions or economic insecurity). Because of the lack of legal protection from clearly identified national authorities, stateless people may be tempted to move in order to find such protection elsewhere -- one of the reasons why many people have been leaving Central Asia. However, others in the same situation prefer to stay, either because they do not feel particularly threatened, or because they feel a move will leave them financially worse off.



CIS countries that have ratified selected international instruments

1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Russian Federation
Tajikistan

1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons

1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

Armenia

1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Georgia
Kyrgystan
Moldova
Russian Federation
Ukraine
Uzbekistan

1949 Geneva Conventions

1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child

All CIS countries



After the Soviet Union

Refugees (98, IV - 1994)

ARTICLES

[Population displacement in the former Soviet Union](#)

Complex refugee and displacement problems have emerged in the former Soviet Union as a result of numerous ethnic conflicts, causing increasing concern at UNHCR and among the international community.

[Meeting the challenge](#)

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister S. Krylov says an influx of refugees and forced migrants into his country is growing, and today totals some 2 million people.

[Chilly reception for refugees in Russia](#)

For most of its history, Russia's borders have been closed both to people trying to get in and to people trying to get out. But the collapse of the Soviet Union changed all that.

[Hostages of the empire](#)

An estimated 25 million Russians today live outside of Russia in the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic countries. Their presence is perhaps the most complex legacy of the Soviet era.

[Bitter legacy of banishment](#)

In 1944, the entire Crimean Tatar nation -- upwards of 250,000 to 350,000 people -- was deported by Stalin to Central Asia. Today, the Tatars are going home, but their return is a difficult one.

[Tip of the iceberg](#)

The Baltic states fear becoming a transit zone between Russia and the Nordic countries for thousands of asylum-seekers from the Third World who long to leave behind poor living conditions in Russia for a better life in the West.

[Conflict in the Caucasus](#)

The collapse of communism and the rise of ethnic strife have plunged the southern



fringes of the former Soviet Union into turmoil, particularly in the Caucasus where some 1.5 million people have been forced from their homes.

[Rebuilding Socialism](#)

The reconstruction of a village called Socialism, torn apart in late 1992 by clan conflict in Tajikistan, is testimony to the increasing stability brought about by cooperation between local, national and international groups.

Population displacement in the former Soviet Union

The collapse of the Soviet system was one of the most momentous events of the 20th century. It has not only altered the political geography of the world, but also created a host of new opportunities and challenges, both for the independent states and autonomous formations which have emerged, or re-emerged, from the Soviet empire, and also for the international community generally.

The post-Soviet landscape has yet to settle after this immense political earthquake, and there is still a great deal of tectonic movement. As the newly independent states seek to overcome the immense difficulties connected with state building, decolonization, economic dislocation and the transition to new political and economic systems, numerous ethnic conflicts and instances of extensive population displacement in various parts of this huge region attest to the continuing instability and dangerous potential for further upheaval and even greater crises.

Ethnic tensions and massive population movements are, however, not new to this part of the world. Indeed, more often than not, the roots of today's problems are to be found in the Soviet, and even tsarist, periods. Although the widespread misconception about the former Soviet Union as being synonymous with Russia tended to obscure the USSR's ethnic heterogeneity and the vitality of its non-Russian peoples, it was in fact the world's largest multinational state. Moreover, behind the facade of unity and the pretense that it was a harmonious new model society based on "free and equal partnership," the Soviet Union was also the last of the great empires and, for most of its history, a totalitarian one at that.

Territorially largely coterminous with the former Russian Empire, from which it was reconstituted by force, the Soviet empire spanned 11 time zones and stretched over 5,600 miles from the Baltic and Black Seas in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. The USSR also inherited a complex "nationalities problem" from the Tsarist Empire which existed on two planes: the vertical, involving the relationship between the majority, and politically and culturally dominant, Russian nation and the non-Russians, many of whom had attempted to establish their own independent states; and the horizontal, that is, the tensions and disputes between some of the non-Russian peoples living next to one another, which were frequently aggravated by Moscow's divide-and-rule policies.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks knew that force alone would not suffice to weld together



the fragmented former Russian "prison of nations," and they initially offered some concessions to national feeling designed to win over the loyalties of the non-Russians. The USSR was organized territorially along ethnic lines right down to the regional and local levels. In Central Asia, new ethnic republics were created to break up the unity of Turkestan (as most of Muslim Central Asia was known after its conquest in the 19th century by Russia). Here, and in the Caucasus, internal borders were frequently arbitrarily imposed.

In the highly centralized, supposedly federal, Soviet Union, which was run by the ruling unitary Communist Party, 15 of the major nationalities had their own nominally sovereign Union republics. But there were dozens of other ethnic groups in this multi-ethnic patchwork, both large and very small, which had their own autonomous state formations.

But what really distinguished the USSR from other empires, was that, from Lenin until Gorbachev, Soviet rulers sought to reforge individuals, peoples and society in accordance with their all-embracing chiliastic ideology. Their policies, involving massive economic transformation and social and cultural "engineering," brought economic and social progress. But, because they were achieved through terror and coercion, the policies also resulted in immense suffering, the loss of untold millions of lives, and the forced displacement of people on a scale that is hard to imagine. Peasants were driven into collective farms, the better-off ones being deported with their families to remote regions; forced labor was used to meet the increasing demands for manpower from the industrialization and regional development programs, and an enormous complex of forced labor camps - the infamous GULAG, was established; entire ethnic groups were deported to Siberia and Central Asia.

During World War II there was further massive loss of life, destruction and population displacement. After the war, large-scale deportation was used to facilitate the Sovietization of the newly acquired territories in the Baltic region, Western Ukraine and Moldova, and Russians were encouraged to settle in these areas. After Stalin's death in 1953, the use of political terror and forced labor was drastically reduced, and many, but by no means all, of the peoples and individuals who had been repressed and forcibly displaced were gradually allowed to return home.

Through its control of the political and economic levers, the Soviet imperial center, however, continued to find ways of inducing mass population flows, usually of Russians (and Russified Ukrainians and Belarusians), to non-Russian republics, for the purposes of promoting regional development, as it saw fit, and strengthening central control. In 1954, for example, Khrushchev ignored the protests of Kazakh Communist officials and launched his "Virgin Lands Scheme" in which hundreds of thousands of "volunteers" were sent to settle and cultivate the supposedly "idle" areas of Kazakhstan, where in fact the Kazakhs had traditionally bred livestock. Consequently, by 1959, the Kazakh share of the population in their own republic had fallen to under a third.



The Kazakhs were not the only ones to fear about their future. The migration of Russians and other Slavs continued into the Central Asian, Caucasian and Baltic republics, especially into the cities. The relatively small Latvian and Estonian nations eventually became especially anxious about their survival. The heavy flow of Russians into Ukraine also did not abate and by 1989 there were over 11.3 million of them in this republic, constituting 22 percent of the total population.

The Soviet government's stimulation of migration flows in the name of economic and political exigencies reinforced ethnic tensions in the republics. As it was, the leading role of the Russians and of their language and culture had been officially promoted from the Stalin period onwards, and the main thrust of Soviet nationalities policy in the post-Stalin period was to forge a "Soviet people" with a Russian cultural core. In this sense, the Russians, who themselves suffered considerably during the Soviet period, were a privileged people. While the non-Russians were pressured to learn and use Russian, very few of the Russian, or Russian-speaking migrants, bothered to learn the languages of non-Russian nationalities, even if they lived among them.

When, in the Brezhnev period, the Soviet command economy began to show increasing signs of stagnation, changes in demographic trends also added to the Soviet leadership's sense of impending crisis. The birthrate of the Russians and other Slavs was declining, while that of the unassimilable Central Asian peoples remained high, giving rise to psychological and political fears, and complicating matters for Soviet central planners and the generals. Furthermore, as the traditionally Muslim Central Asia peoples began to reap the benefits of modernization policies and of affirmative action programs, they grew more assertive, and Russian and other migrants began to leave. In 1979, Soviet concern about the "Muslim" demographic time bomb, the possible spread of Islamic fundamentalism and the security of the USSR's southern borders, were factors behind the decision to invade Afghanistan.

During the next decade, there was a complete reversal of the North-South migration pattern - that is of Slavic migrants moving to the Central Asian republics and the Caucasus - and hundreds of thousands of persons left Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and other southern republics.

The scale and acuteness of the "nationalities question," which had long been officially proclaimed as "solved," became apparent almost as soon as Gorbachev embarked on his course of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Designed to revamp and not dismantle the Soviet system, these policies nevertheless led away from totalitarianism and empire. With the relaxation of controls, problems which had been suppressed or concealed suddenly came to the fore.

The first major tremor was felt in December 1986 when Kazakhs rioted after Moscow appointed a Russian as the new Party boss in Kazakhstan. During the early phase of *glasnost*, however, the only major displacement of population was caused in April 1986 by the world's worst nuclear accident at the Chernobyl atomic



power station north of the Ukrainian capital, Kiev. But within two years, the ethnic conflicts that were accumulating as a result of the Soviet leadership's continuing reluctance to address the nationalities problem began producing hemorrhaging of refugees and displaced persons.

In early 1988, the long smoldering problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, (the predominantly Armenian enclave which Moscow had placed under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction in the 1920s) suddenly flared up. As a result of the ethnic strife an estimated 500,000 Armenians and Azerbaijanis fled in opposite directions, from Azerbaijan to Armenia, and vice versa. The following summer, communal violence erupted in the Fergana Valley in Central Asia and over 60,000 Meskhetian Turks - one of the deported peoples - were driven out of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

As the center began to lose control, the daunting scale of the difficulties facing the Soviet leadership in trying to hold its crumbling empire together was also revealed in the last Soviet census, which was carried out in 1989. It emerged that the Russians now barely accounted for 50 percent of the population of 285 million. Far from eradicating national consciousness, Soviet policies had in fact had the opposite effect: the entire trend continued to be in the direction of the concentration of most nationalities in their own areas and their greater assertiveness. National feeling and assertiveness were on the rise throughout the USSR, and the non-Russians from Moldova and the Baltic republics to Central Asia were beginning to pass laws aimed at upgrading and bolstering the status of their native languages - in other words, counteracting the effects of Russification.

The census also exposed the extent of the displacement and intermixing of peoples that had taken place and how huge was the number of people who now risked being considered aliens, or even colonizers, in others' homelands. About one-fifth of the Soviet population - between 54 million and 65 million people, depending on what definition of a homeland was used - lived outside their national units. Of these, 25.3 million were Russians, who were also the only group to enjoy cultural facilities in their own language outside their own republic and who could, until now, at least, feel at home in any part of the Soviet Union.

Impatient with the Kremlin, the non-Russians raised the standards of national self-determination and sovereignty and sought to build, or renew, their own independent states. The Russians themselves were gradually affected by the virus of largely democratic nationalism. With Boris Yeltsin and other reformist leaders taking up the cause of affirming Russia's sovereignty, the imperial center split and lost its resolve. After a botched attempted putsch in August 1991 by Communist Party diehards who wanted to preserve the old order, the compromise solution of a loose non-state voluntary association, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), to replace the USSR, was finally forced on Gorbachev and the reluctant center in December 1991 by the joint action of the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Because the collapse of the Soviet Union took the form - on the whole - of a remarkably peaceful and orderly process of dissolution, and was generally greeted



with hope in the newly independent states, including Russia, as the beginning of a new age, there was no flood of refugees to the outside world.

All too soon, though, it became apparent how difficult it was to overcome the legacy of 70 years of Soviet rule and that democratic and economic transformation was going to be a highly complex and painful process that could not be rushed. The newly independent states also began to act as sovereign entities, seeking to reaffirm the national identity of the titular nation, to safeguard their territorial integrity and, in some cases, to change existing borders.

Because many of the borders had been arbitrarily demarcated in the past and populations had been intermixed, this has frequently spelled trouble. Apart from the obvious case of Armenia's unresolved dispute with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, which soon developed into open war between the two states, there are other examples of friction and conflict. In fact, the first outbreak of ethnic violence on the territory of the Russian Federation itself occurred in late October 1992 in the North Caucasus when tens of thousands of Ingush were driven out of the disputed Prigorodny district in North Ossetia by Ossetians. Prior to their deportation in 1944, the area had belonged to the Ingush.

Elsewhere, relations between Russia and Ukraine have been strained by, among other issues, the future of the Crimean peninsula and the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet based there. The Crimean Tatars had been deported from Crimea in 1944, and Russian settlers had moved in; yet, in 1954 the peninsula, with its Ukrainian minority, was transferred from the Russian Federation to Ukraine by Khrushchev. Among other examples of border disputes are those between Estonia and Russia, Lithuania and Belarus, Russia and Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

All of the independent countries which emerged as a result of the disintegration of the USSR, including Russia, are to a greater or lesser extent themselves multi-ethnic states and now have to deal with integrating national minorities and reducing centrifugal tendencies.

In Estonia and Latvia, citizenship and other laws have been passed which are implicitly aimed at halting immigration into these states and encouraging the "repatriation" of Russians. Because the laws in effect temporarily disenfranchise much of the non-indigenous population, they have been condemned as discriminatory by the Slavic minorities and Russia, which has assumed the role of a vocal protector of the rights of Russians and Russian-speakers now suddenly living "abroad." In Ukraine, however, where the bulk of the Russians living outside of Russia are settled, analogous laws have been carefully crafted to integrate, and not alienate, the national minorities. Kiev is asking for similar treatment for several million Ukrainians living in Russia and other newly independent states.

In Georgia and in Moldova, problems over the rights of national minorities have led to armed conflicts and large-scale population displacement. In 1991, fighting



broke out between the Georgians and the Ossetian minority, and the following year, between the Georgians and the Abkhaz. In Moldova, armed conflict erupted in 1992 after the Russian-dominated Transdniestrian enclave (whose leaders had been opposed to the dissolution of the USSR) sought to break away.

One of the most serious conflicts since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been in Tajikistan, where in 1992 a civil war broke out. Hundreds of thousands of Tajik refugees fled to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Because of the intermixture of ethnic groups (for instance, neighboring Uzbekistan, the most populous of the Central Asian states, has 950,000 Tajiks and 850,000 Kazakhs, while about 2.5 million Uzbeks live outside of Uzbekistan, half of them in Tajikistan), Tajikistan's porous border with Afghanistan, and the fear of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, the conflict in Tajikistan has major implications for the entire sub-region.

Hardly surprisingly, since the collapse of the USSR, the spontaneous outflow of Russians and Russian-speakers to Russia from the former Soviet republics which have now become "foreign countries," has greatly intensified. It is estimated that since 1989 over 2 million people have moved to Russia for a variety of reasons: to escape conflict, because they perceive themselves as victims of actual or potential persecution or discrimination - the Russian authorities have designated these two categories of displaced Russian-speakers as "forced migrants" - or for economic motives.

Roughly a quarter of the people who have moved to Russia since 1989 have been recognized as either refugees or forced migrants, the largest percentage coming from Tajikistan (over 25 percent), Georgia (19 percent), Azerbaijan (16 percent) and other Central Asian states, with a relatively low percentage of about 1.5 percent coming from Latvia and Estonia. The North Caucasian republic of Chechnya, which has attempted to break away from Russia, and the conflict between the Ingush and Ossetians have also produced tens of thousands of internally displaced and "forced migrants."

This, in addition to the problems of accommodating the tens of thousands of former Soviet military personnel withdrawn from Central and Eastern Europe and the newly independent states, as well as the movement of internal economic migrants away from remote former secret military production sites and artificial cities located in inhospitable regions in the North, Siberia and the Far East, has placed an enormous strain on the Russian Federation and is exacerbating social tensions.

The exodus of the Russian-speaking population from Central Asia is also hurting local economies and social services because it is depriving the sub-region of skilled personnel with badly needed professional and industrial skills, such as doctors, teachers and engineers. In several of the Central Asian states, the problem has become so serious that efforts have been made by the authorities to reassure the Slavic population in order to stem the outflow.



All of the newly independent states have also been faced with the acute and growing problems of asylum-seekers and illegal and transit migrants from outside the former Soviet region. None of them have the resources and institutional capacity to deal effectively with the problems associated with population movements, and some Russian authorities have even begun arguing that the Russian Federation is unable to fulfil the obligations it undertook when, in 1992, it acceded to the 1951 Convention on Refugees.

In 1994, UNHCR knew of over 60,000 people in Russia from outside the CIS and Baltic states who were claiming to be refugees. Almost half of them came from Afghanistan, the other large groups being from Somalia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Angola, China, Ethiopia and Zaire. The number of illegal migrants, many of them in transit westward, is believed to be considerably higher, perhaps as much as half a million. An estimated 150,000 Chinese alone are believed to have entered Russia illegally.

The complex refugee and displacement problems on the territory of the former Soviet Union have led UNHCR and other U.N. agencies and international humanitarian organizations to become involved in a part of the world where until recently they had been absent. Since 1991, UNHCR has established a presence in Moscow and several other countries of the CIS and has been active in addressing refugee-related problems. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan it has provided humanitarian assistance and protection to tens of thousands of the displaced and endeavored to promote repatriation under conditions of security and safety. Through advice, training and technical assistance, UNHCR has also helped the newly independent countries in the region begin building an institutional capacity to deal with refugees and migrants.

Clearly, this is only a start and much more needs to be done in a more imaginative, concerted and comprehensive manner to deal effectively with existing and potential problems associated with the large-scale displacement of people. Today, the entire post-Soviet set-up is still latently unstable. There is no shortage of existing conflicts and flashpoints. Much will depend on Russia - the major regional power, whose forces are already playing a role in Tajikistan and Georgia - and on the direction in which it will develop. But much could also depend on whether the international community and the United Nations system recognize the challenges, dangers and opportunities which this volatile region presents and take timely, broad-ranging preventive action to help stabilize conditions, manage conflict, and thereby reduce the risks of future extensive internal and external displacement.

Bohdan Nahaylo
UNHCR senior advisor on the CIS & Baltic states.



Meeting the Challenge

Following are excerpts from an October 4 address by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister S. Krylov at UNHCR's Executive Committee meeting in Geneva:

In every region of the world, the deep-rooted causes of humanitarian catastrophes are identical: social and economic instability; a rise in aggressive nationalism and xenophobia; ethnic, clan and religious intolerance; and disregard for basic human rights. For Russia and other countries within the post-Soviet space these are not abstract notions but the day-to-day reality of societies painfully parting with a totalitarian past.

The peculiarity of Russia's situation is that humanitarian problems remain unabated despite democratic reforms. The magnitude and novelty of the problems we face overshadow the means at our disposal. Several zones of instability and regional conflicts - primarily in the Caucasus and Central Asia - are Russia's immediate neighbors. Flows of refugees and forced migrants from these regions into Russia are growing. Today, they account for nearly 2 million persons.

The ever-growing number of ethnic Russians who wish to settle in Russia is of special concern. From relatively safe Uzbekistan alone, the number of such persons grew eight-fold between January and August 1994.

Russia also faces a constantly growing flow of refugees from Asia and Africa. It is no revelation that the majority of these persons regard Russia as only temporary shelter on the way to Western Europe and America. But unsettled nationality issues, porous borders and tougher entry requirements in traditional asylum countries means there is a growing danger that they will settle down in Russia - creating a kind of "reservation" for illegal immigrants.

We are firmly convinced that all these problems should be solved primarily by ourselves. This is not only our moral duty, but an obligation under a variety of international instruments to which Russia is a party.

We have achieved some progress in meeting the requirements of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. A federal migration program has recently been approved, for example, and a number of regulations adopted on migration control, status determination and other refugee- and migrant-related issues. The Federal Migration Service of Russia, established in 1992, is expanding its activities, with offices in many regions of the country working to international standards.



There has also been progress in relations with our partners in the Commonwealth of Independent States. An agreement on assistance to refugees and forced migrants has been signed and a draft convention on the rights of ethnic minorities has been developed. Russia is doing a great deal to stabilize the economic and political situation in CIS countries. This is probably the most effective way to reduce outflows of refugees and migrants.

We know we have made some mistakes in this new endeavor. Some of them are caused by inexperience; others, unfortunately, by the unwillingness of some officials to act in accordance with rules of law and human morals. Despite such problems we will continue to strive to fulfill our obligations.

We appreciate the moral and material support we receive from international organizations, prime among them UNHCR. Experience of joint work - such as the implementation of the Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons to Abkhazia - has been very valuable. We will draw on the lessons learned in our next task: preparing adequate conditions for the return of refugees from North Ossetia and Tajikistan.

Russia should never be allowed to become a source of instability - a country producing uncontrollable flows of aggressively minded refugees. To prevent that, we need broader cooperation with UNHCR and other international organizations such as UNDP. The regions of Russia that accept refugees should be priority recipients of technical and other assistance provided by the UNHCR and other international organizations. Russian experts who work with refugees should receive broader training.

We in Russia have been working to prepare an international conference on refugees. We have also prepared a draft national report and have established a legal basis for defining refugee status. We have improved coordination between agencies dealing with refugee problems. Our consultations with numerous states have confirmed their interest in the above-mentioned conference. This is an encouraging sign demonstrating that the international community does not intend to distance itself from the problems in the post-Soviet space.

Despite its many complex problems Russia also participates in the UNHCR-organized operation in Yugoslavia and has already provided \$500,000 in aid to Rwanda. We are ready to take part in UNHCR operations in several countries of the former USSR, particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata has said that "by protecting individuals, we reduce tensions in society and enhance global human security". We agree. The protection of individuals is the only way to lay down a solid basis for the sustained and progressive development of mankind. In the next century, meeting the real rights and needs of persons will be a genuine criterion of the progress of our civilization.



Chilly Reception for Refugees in Russia

Russia is a country unused to refugees. For most of its history, Russia's borders have been closed both to people trying to get in and to people trying to get out. But the collapse of the Soviet Union changed that and opened Russia to the outside world - and the outside world came to Russia.

In the past, the Soviet Union accepted very few refugees, mostly revolutionaries and communists fleeing persecution. But now more than a million refugees and migrants have flooded into Russia from the republics of the former Soviet Union. Tens of thousands more have come from places as far-flung as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia, hoping for asylum and using Russia as a stepping stone to Western Europe.

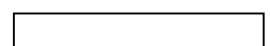
According to the Federal Migration Service (FMS), the arm of the Russian government dealing with migrants, there are about 500,000 officially registered migrants and refugees from the former USSR in Russia, and as many as 2 million who have not been registered. In comparison, UNHCR has registered more than 60,000 foreigners from outside the former Soviet Union.

The problem could get much worse. There are about 25 million ethnic Russians living outside Russia. The FMS estimates that 2-3 million of them will return in the next two years.

Russia, caught unprepared for the huge flows of people across its borders, rushed to establish laws and institutions to deal with them. Following adoption by the Russian Parliament, the 1951 U.N. Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol entered into force in early 1993. With it, Moscow hoped that Russia would get help for the huge masses of returning Russians.

"We signed so that the international community would actively help with refugees - but international help has been very weak," said Vyacheslav Bakhmin, head of the Foreign Ministry's Directorate of International Humanitarian and Cultural Cooperation and a supporter of the signing of the Convention. "Our position is that the Russian refugees in Russia are refugees in the international sense, and we want the same kind of help that other states get."

"The Convention does not answer Russia's needs and the Foreign Ministry miscalculated when they signed it," said Yuri Arkhipov, the outspoken head of the external migration department of the FMS and a fierce opponent of the Convention



and of Russia accepting refugees. Arkhipov has blamed the Convention for turning Russia into a "holding pen" for refugees from around the world who enter Russia illegally, "spread disease" and who hope in vain to get to the West.

Juan Amunategui, UNHCR's Regional Representative in Moscow, refuted criticism that UNHCR focuses almost exclusively on refugees from outside the Baltics and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). He said a large part of the problem was that Russia still had no system of refugee determination to regularize the status of genuine refugees. Once a system is in place, UNHCR plans to make an international appeal for \$27.5 million to assist non-CIS refugees, CIS refugees and returning Russians. But even with the appeal, UNHCR will be hard-pressed to help. UNHCR Moscow is spending \$6 million in 1994 to help only 7,000 people.

"It is unfair to say that we are assisting only non-CIS asylum-seekers," said Amunategui, who is also the U.N.'s Regional Representative. He said UNHCR is running a joint program with the FMS to help forced migrants in the southern Russian region of Krasnodar. He also noted that it was very difficult to get accurate information on the numbers and needs of these people from the Russian authorities.

Russia's lack of money and experience in dealing with refugees has caused huge problems for all types of migrants arriving in the country. But the experiences of CIS and non-CIS refugees are wildly different, reflecting Russia's traditional suspicion of foreigners.

"Some officials in the FMS would like the problem to disappear and to deport all the foreign refugees. It is a reflection of the old isolationist viewpoint," said Bakhmin.

The Russian diaspora has received attention from Russian politicians ranging from President Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Many of the Russians come from areas devastated by wars and where the local population is often resentful of ethnic Russians. People leaving areas like war-torn Tajikistan often abandon apartments and possessions and arrive in Russia with nothing. In places that are a little calmer, the head of the family often goes to Russia to try to find a place to live and work before importing the family to Russia.

"It is very difficult in Russia," said Vassily Yevtakinov, the head of a committee of Russians from Armenia. "Everybody has to make do on their own because the FMS does not really have the resources to help. People have to rely on their friends and family."

According to Yevtakinov, many regions are unwilling to accept returning Russians because they are a burden on local budgets and because they compete for already scarce jobs.

But whatever their material problems, returning Russians speak the language, look the same as everybody else and are citizens of the country. For asylum-seekers



from outside the CIS, the difficulties are much more severe.

Many of them came to Russia illegally or with tourist visas from Russian consulates abroad, hoping to get ferried to Western Europe by criminal gangs who make a handsome profit smuggling people across borders. But once in Moscow, they are stranded with no hope of moving on to Europe and have no desire or possibility of returning home.

Despite signing the 1951 Convention and passing its own laws on refugees, Russia has done almost nothing to process the claims of asylum-seekers. People have been unable to claim refugee status and so are considered illegal aliens by the Russian authorities. Without official papers, they have no right to housing, their children are unable to go to school, they cannot work or get medical care. UNHCR has stepped into the breach and is issuing identity cards to asylum-seekers, but the Russian police refuse to recognize UNHCR's authority to issue such papers.

A new law on dealing with asylum-seekers was published in September. It promises to issue temporary residence permits to asylum-seekers and to decide their cases within three months. But by late October, nobody had been processed.

"People wanted to see if it was possible to live in Russia," said Abu Asil, the Iraqi community representative on a UNHCR-supported refugee committee. "But after people saw how difficult and dangerous it is here, they all want to go to Europe."

Stuck in Russia with no recognized papers and no work, refugees have become targets for the police, who frequently arrest, harass and extort money from them. According to figures from the UNHCR reception center in Moscow, 400 incidents of police harassment were reported in the first six months of 1994. More than half of them were against Somalis and Angolans, despite the fact that they make up only 13 percent of non-CIS refugees in Russia. The darker the skin color and the more the person stands out, the more police attention they receive. Afghan and Iraqi refugees are also targeted because they resemble the black-haired peoples of the Caucasus, whom the police accuse of bringing crime to Russia.

"As soon as the police see your black hair, they think you are a bandit or a drug dealer," said Sharif, a 32-year-old refugee from Afghanistan.

In an example of what can happen with no legal protection, 21 Afghan refugees were forcibly deported back to Afghanistan from the Krasnodar region of southern Russia in early August. The FMS said that the deportations were legal because the Afghans had not applied for refugee status. But UNHCR workers who travelled to Krasnodar were told that the regional government refuses to accept applications for refugee status.

The deportation brought a strong protest from UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, which complained to the Russian government that the deportations were contrary to the 1951 Convention. The protest note added that UNHCR "sees this incident in the wider context of the generally deteriorating protection situation of asylum-



seekers and refugees in the territory of the Russian Federation."

"Those Afghans were in Russia illegally," said Arkhipov of the FMS. "Besides, we don't have a communist government here anymore, so why should we accept these refugees who supported communism in their own country?"

The number of refugees coming to Russia from outside the former USSR has dropped as word has spread about the unfriendly reception and poor living conditions. Those who remain are only a small fraction of Russia's overall refugee problem. But after waiting in limbo, often for years, they need a solution that will allow them to get on with their lives. And that still leaves the almost insurmountable problem of dealing with the ex-Soviet migrants.

"It is a strategic mistake on the part of international organizations to deal only with non-CIS refugees," warned Bakhmin of the Foreign Ministry. "If the Russian refugee problem is not dealt with, it could act as a detonator for an explosion in Russian politics."

Jan Cienski

Hostages of the Empire

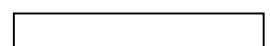
Editor's note: The views expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the IOM. For the sake of simplicity, the countries of the CIS - except for Russia - and the Baltic states are referred to as "the republics."

The presence of important Russian communities in the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic countries constitutes perhaps the most complex legacy of the Soviet era. Several factors make this issue the linchpin of the post-Soviet landscape, including:

- the sheer size of these communities (around 25 million people, or 17.4 percent of all Russians in 1989);
- the significant role they play in the social and economic life of these states;
- the geopolitical importance of the so-called "near abroad" for Russia;
- the geopolitical importance of Russia for the states of the region.

In the aftermath of the Soviet break-up, the "Russian minority question" has come to play a central role in the process of redefinition by the CIS and Baltic states of their respective roles and interests in the region.

They have been called "hostages of the empire" - people whose destiny happened to cross that of a huge multinational state in disintegration. Indeed, whether these Russian communities will remain in or leave their current homes, and whether they will stay on as an integrated ethnic group or as an alienated minority, will depend less on their own behavior than on that of the major actors - Russia and the republics.



Conversely, the attitudes of these states towards the Russian communities living outside of Russia will constitute a valuable indicator of where these states want to go, and what they want to become. Will Russia become an aggressive regional power with neo-imperial ambitions, or a democratic one, keen on dialogue with its neighbors? Will the CIS and Baltic states become self-centered, mono-ethnic entities, or democratic, pluralist and tolerant societies? The answers to such crucial questions will be found in these states' policies concerning the Russian minority.

Between 1930 and 1970, millions of Slavs - and particularly Russians - settled in what were then the Soviet republics in search of better pay, decent housing and rewarding jobs. As a result of these unprecedented migratory flows, by the late 1980s Russians constituted the largest ethnic minority in almost all of the republics. In 1989, their share of the total population of the republics oscillated between 1.6 percent in Armenia and 37.8 percent in Kazakhstan.

A highly transient population, the Russian migrants were a typical product of the Soviet regime. Living in Tallinn or Tashkent did not make any difference to them, for they considered all of the republics as an integral part of the same country, the USSR. In moving, they might sacrifice stability for higher social status. After a while, they would move again, responding to the government's or the *Komsomol's* appeal to toil the virgin lands of Central Asia. And they would retire in the Baltic region, where life was almost as good as in Europe. They truly were the new Soviet people.

For these migrants, the break-up of the Soviet Union constituted a profound trauma. Suddenly, they found themselves living in a foreign land: "*okazalis' v emigratsii*" ("We found ourselves in the emigration"). What was their own homeland, then? Certainly not the village in Central Russia they had left years ago. Home was the USSR, which unfortunately for them no longer existed. As one of them put it: "Overnight, we became refugees. We didn't leave our country; it was our country that abandoned us."

Only by looking at the Russian immigrants as "true Soviet nomads," rather than as ethnic Russians, can one understand their behavior in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Most striking after the unsuccessful attempted coup by communist hardliners and the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 is their passivity, coupled with a kind of stupor. The Russians had great difficulty in accepting the disappearance of their homeland and in adapting to the new realities. This should not come as a surprise, given the great extent to which the indigenous populations themselves were disoriented by these events. Still today, many millions of Russians living in the CIS and Baltic states are unable to face the epochal changes that have taken place around them, much less reckon with the consequences of such changes.

The first major, direct effect on Russians living in the republics has been the steady and rapid loss of their privileged position in local society. Says a Moscow



sociologist: "The tragedy of the Russians in the republics is that, having got used to a comfortable status, they are now in a state of political apathy; they reject the new reality, do not fight for power and boycott elections."

The worsening of the Russians' once privileged social position is most bitterly felt, and indeed resented, in the Central Asian republics, where the difference in social level between the indigenous population and the Slavs was greatest. Although the prospect of a privileged social position was one of the attractions that drew Russians to the republics in the first place, the loss of this status does not necessarily mean that they will now leave *en masse*. Loss of status is a necessary condition for their departure, but not a sufficient one.

The second consequence of the 1991 events is that the Russians living in the republics are alone. Moscow no longer has the means to protect them, as it could during the Soviet era. Even worse, Moscow's interests and priorities do not always seem to coincide with those of the Russians living in the republics. This has particularly angered the latter, who have felt both betrayed and manipulated.

The Russians' growing solitude has gone through several stages. Immediately after the August 1991 attempted coup, Russia wilfully initiated a policy of disengagement from the political struggles of the independent republics, thus conveying the impression of abandoning the local Russians to their fate. At that time, the general feeling within Moscow's democratic circles, which had enthusiastically supported the independence movements in the republics, was that the Russians living in the republics were mostly hard-line communists who did not deserve their support.

In spring 1992, however, the Russian minority question began to play an increasingly important role both on Russia's domestic political scene and in its relationship with the "near abroad." The spark was the re-enactment of the Estonian citizenship law, which did not grant automatic citizenship to Russians permanently living in Estonia.

Since then, the Russian minority question has become a handy political tool for both ends of the political spectrum. On the one hand, the political debate has been successfully manipulated by chauvinist movements, which have accused the democratic government in Moscow of being excessively complacent with the republican authorities. The nationalists were and still are exploiting the issue to goad Russia into a greater involvement in the internal affairs of the republics.

On the other hand, the Russian democrats have felt betrayed by the authorities in the republics, particularly the Baltic states, whom they saw as turning against the local Russian population in order to consolidate their newly acquired power.

The Russian minority question has become the linchpin of Russia's foreign policy in the "near abroad." The debate was initially dominated by the contrasting approaches of then Vice President Rutskoi, who favored the use of force in defense of Russian minorities, and Foreign Minister Kozyrev, partisan of a moderate



approach. Very soon, however, the radicalization of the political atmosphere in Russia, spearheaded by the Supreme Soviet, led Kozyrev to adopt a more aggressive stance.

In early 1993, Kozyrev's and the Parliament's foreign policy positions began drawing closer. At the same time, the Ministry of Defense came to the forefront, calling for a more confrontational approach. Today, the differences between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense are skillfully played out to maximum advantage in what can be described as a "good guy/bad guy" strategy.

For the past two years, Russia has repeatedly accused the Baltic states of "gross violations of human rights," and some Central Asian ones of "Islamic fundamentalism." The predictable outcome of such an approach - a net increase in tensions between Russia and the republics - was clearly a liability for the Russians living in the republics. In fact, many of them have repeatedly expressed the wish that Russia conduct a less confrontational diplomacy on their behalf.

Moscow's aggressive foreign policy on the Russian minority question has led some observers to argue that Russia's priority appears to be less that of defending the rights and well-being of Russians in the republics, than that of pursuing other, more important foreign policy objectives.

The third major consequence of the 1991 events is that, in some republics, Russians no longer feel at home. While this growing feeling of alienation may be due to governmental policy, a more or less spontaneous popular mood, or exaggerated fears, there is no denying that Russians in the republics are feeling increasingly insecure and uncertain about their future. In Estonia and Latvia, this feeling has been reinforced by a clearly identifiable governmental line aimed at delaying or even hindering the acquisition by Russians of some form of legal status, with the not-so-hidden purpose of encouraging their departure from the country. This policy has indeed produced a feeling of insecurity in the Russian-speaking population and has reinforced their mistrust of local authorities. Despite this, it is clear that most Slavs have no intention of leaving the Baltic states, at least in the near future. In the final analysis, it appears that the policies of the Estonian and Latvian leaderships have created a climate of mistrust that is more detrimental to their own countries than to the Russian population itself.

What is the future of the Russian communities living in the republics? What options are available to them? The most discussed one is out-migration. This is called "repatriation" by Baltic officials - who stress the ethnic link between the immigrants and Russia - and "forced migration" by Russian authorities, who underscore the involuntary and even forcible nature of the outflow. Out-migration is favored by the Baltic governments and by some groups of Russians, while the Central Asian governments, having realized its disruptive impact on the local economy, are actively looking for ways to keep the Russians in the region.

The Russian government, faced with a difficult social and economic situation, is *de facto* dissuading the Russians from coming back. While there is little doubt that an



influx of even a few million would place great strain on Russian resources, some observers have concluded that Moscow's hidden agenda is to retain a Russian presence in the republic as a fifth column. As a Russian from Tajikistan angrily stated: "It's not just that Russia can't take us in, it doesn't want to. It's not just a matter of economic difficulties. Above all, it's a political problem. It's advantageous for Russia to keep us in the republics in the role of hostages."

Still, it is a fact that only a small percentage of the Russian population of the republics wants to leave. Most of the Russians have been living in the republics for more than 10 years, have married and are raising their children there. If the best interests of the Russian communities are to be taken into account, those who want to leave must be allowed and helped to do so. At the same time, those who want to stay must be encouraged and assisted in the process of integration. To be successful, this will require a change in attitude as well as policy by both Russia and the republics.

Claire Messina

Coordinator, CIS & Baltic states

International Organization for Migration

Bitter Legacy of Banishment

They are a young family, although the mother and father look older than their years. Their young son, Ismail, plays fitfully with his rusty bike, but never smiles. Their home for the past several months has been a metal cargo container in a field in Churkurcha in the outskirts of Simferopol, the leading city in Crimea. They are a family of Crimean Tatars who returned three years ago from Uzbekistan to their ancestral home. But they were evicted from the first place they encamped, and they are now squatters in a flood plain populated mainly by grazing cows and dotted with half-built stone houses.

The Crimean Tatars are a deported people. In 1944, the entire Crimean Tatar nation - upwards of 250,000 to 350,000 people - were deported by Stalin to Central Asia, allegedly for collaboration with the Nazis. Many perished in the exercise. In 1988, after more than 30 years of agitation, permission was given to the Tatars to return. While the repatriation began slowly, the pace has quickened as Ukraine, the nation in which Crimea is now located, became independent in 1991. Upwards of 280,000 Tatars are now estimated to have returned, and a similar number are expected to repatriate over the remainder of this decade.

Upon return to Crimea, the Tatars found their homes and lands occupied. Some resorted to seizing lands which they then homesteaded; sporadic conflicts with local authorities have resulted. At the political level, this tension resonates with a simmering dispute in Ukraine about the status of Crimea, given to the Ukrainian



republic by Khrushchev in 1954 as "a gift from the Russian people." In general, the population of Crimea, mostly ethnic Russians, now desires closer links with the Russian Federation, an outcome reflected in the recent presidential election. Elements of the population openly agitate for secession.

There are many potential political fault lines in Ukraine, including disputes over scarce energy resources and the status of the Black Sea Fleet, but some believe that the treatment of repatriating Tatars could provide the spark that ignites a broader conflict between Russia and Ukraine which could have monstrous consequences. The prevention of such a conflagration should be a first order priority of the international community.

In the effort to repatriate, Crimean Tatars face a panoply of obstacles, including difficulties in arranging inter-state transport of their personal property, exaction of prohibitive tariffs, and other measures that frustrate movement. Upon their arrival in Crimea, they find their homes have long since been destroyed or occupied. Many acquire new land and build new homes. Others of lesser means simply squat on unused land and build makeshift shelters, hoping for normal lives and lawful residence. The situation is unregulated and rife with uncertainty and potential for conflict.

In an effort to begin addressing the situation, and in recognition of the meager resources available from Ukraine because of the abysmal state of its economy, the Kiev office of the United Nations is preparing a prospective appeal to donor governments to support projects that will contribute to the maintenance of peace and stability in Crimea through development of infrastructure to absorb returning Tatars and other ethnic minorities. About \$15 million would be sought from the international community to realize this initiative. Ongoing consultations are being held with potential donor governments to assess interest. While the concept is laudable, it will be crucial to ensure that the affected populations (including Crimean Tatars) participate as much as possible in the design and implementation of these rehabilitative projects. A development effort shaped by those immediately concerned would stand the best chance of success.

If anything, a focus by the U.N. solely on issues of absorption in Ukraine (Crimea) may be too limited. A broad multilateral approach involving the affected host governments, impacted transportation facilities, and the authorities in Ukraine, could better manage a movement that became international in character after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. International institutions, including UNHCR, International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations Development Program, among others, should work together to promote international cooperation and facilitate the orderly movement of people in this sensitive context. Inter-agency consultation should be initiated immediately in order to organize a consolidated international appeal for funds to support a comprehensive approach.

The various international institutions concerned have a unique opportunity now to mediate between the affected governments in order to regulate this extended repatriation. The Crimean Tatars are not refugees in flight from persecution, but



rather people who seek to return to their homeland after enduring mass expulsion and gross violations of their human rights. Of course, they are not the only people who have been punished by banishment in this region. Others include the Meshkhetian Turks, approximately 100,000 of whom now reside in Azerbaijan en route from Central Asia to Georgia; or the Volga Germans, the most numerous of the deported groups.

But there is potential now for effective solution-making which may prevent conflict, and which may establish an important precedent in the region. Effective redress could be provided to the Crimean Tatars, and the prospects for international cooperation and security could be enhanced. The basic objectives of ensuring justice and peace are surely among the most urgent tasks for the international community to address in the new world disorder.

Arthur C. Helton

(Mr. Helton, a lawyer, directs Migration Programs at the Open Society Institute in New York. He recently led a mission of inquiry to Ukraine, including Crimea.)

Tip of the Iceberg

Hassan had a dream: flee Iraq, where his life was in danger, and make it to Sweden, via Moscow and Estonia.

But his dream ended in an Estonian prison in January 1994. Since then, his life has been a nightmare. "I didn't leave Saddam Hussein's hell to find myself in another hell," he says. "All I want is a place to live in peace and security. Instead, I'm treated as a criminal. I've done nothing wrong. My only crime is to have entered Estonia illegally, without a visa. Does that justify putting someone in jail?"

Hassan lives in Maardu prison, a few kilometers from Estonia's capital, Tallinn, with dozens of other Iraqi asylum-seekers as desperate as he is.

On 19 September, 85 asylum-seekers incarcerated in Estonia - in Maardu, Hardu and Parnu prisons - began a hunger strike to attract attention to their plight. By the end of October, 20 still refused to eat. Despair led one of Hassan's colleagues to stitch his lips together. For a time, even the 17 children detained in Hardu with their mothers refused any nourishment.

"We have no choice but to imprison these people", explained Juhan Parts, Vice-Chancellor of the Estonian Foreign Ministry. "It's the best way we have to dissuade refugee movements to our country." Hassan's dream is a nightmare to the Baltic countries - especially Estonia, because of its proximity to Sweden and Finland.

The Baltic states fear becoming a transit zone between Russia and the Nordic countries for the thousands of asylum-seekers from the Third World who long to



leave poor living conditions in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia. Though there has been some progress, borders in this part of the world remain porous, and some frontier officials are susceptible to corruption. Moreover, asylum-seekers are easy prey for unscrupulous human smugglers.

The two other Baltic countries - Lithuania and Latvia - have no refugee policy. Refugees are not jailed, as in Estonia, but they are marginalized. No aid is allotted them, and most struggle to get to the Nordic countries.

Salma is 32 years old. Of Kurdish origin, she lived in Baghdad before she fled with her 53-year-old mother, leaving behind her father, brothers and sisters. They first went to Jordan, then flew to Russia. "I wanted to go to Moscow, because I knew it was the best way to get to Scandinavia," said Salma. "It was easy to get a visa in a travel agency in Amman."

"But I couldn't stay in Moscow: it was too expensive and too dangerous," Salma continued. "The Mafia even broke into the apartment we were living in one day and demanded money. Fortunately, they didn't find anything. But I was so afraid I decided to leave." Salma and her mother got on a train to Tallinn, via Riga, in Latvia. "We didn't have a visa," she said. "We gave \$200 to the conductor so he'd close his eyes and let us through."

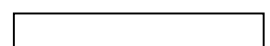
They arrived in Tallinn on 3 August 1993 and contacted an Iraqi resident in Sweden who promised to transport them there for \$2,500 each. But the smuggler left with the money, and they never saw him again. "The police arrested us on 26 August with about 50 other Iraqis, and took us to Maardu," Salma explained. It isn't easy disappearing into a crowd of blond Estonians when your hair is black and curly and your skin is dark. "In the beginning, we were together," Salma continued. But last April other asylum-seekers arrived in Estonia, and families were separated.

"The housing, the food, the health-care, aren't good," said Salma. "But they're probably no worse than for most Estonians. It's the uncertainty and the absence of freedom that are intolerable."

Like the other Baltic countries, Estonia has not acceded to the 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Asylum-seekers are considered illegal immigrants, and treated as such. They risk the legal penalties: two months' imprisonment, indefinitely renewable.

For now, the Estonian government has no intention of acceding to the Convention, or of drawing up a national law on refugees. "If we did, it would attract other refugees," Parts said. "The simplest solution would be to send them back where they come from: Russia. But we can't. They have no identity papers and Russia won't accept them without proof that they came through Russian territory."

How can a country which itself has complained of human rights abuses while under Soviet occupation justify such an attitude? "There's no reason to keep these



people in prison," Parts conceded. "But given our economic difficulties, we don't have a choice."

Three years after independence, Estonia's economic situation is lackluster. Decades of Soviet occupation transformed this rural country into an industrialized state, with factories now so out-dated that some which once employed 13,000 workers now give work to only 4,000. "Raw materials and energy that the USSR once delivered free disappeared overnight - along with the Soviet market - when the Soviet empire was dismantled," explained Jan Wahlberg, Tallinn representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Salaries are low: \$150 a month, on average. Retirees lost their savings when the ruble was replaced by the Estonian crown; pensions are now \$30 a month. Unemployment is almost 10 percent, and rising. That rate "would not be catastrophic in a Western country, where the unemployed are looked after by a welfare system," noted Wahlberg. "But in Estonia that system hardly exists. Benefits are so low that most of the unemployed don't even bother to register."

Estonia will need 15 years to attain the living standard of, say, Portugal. "In the 1930s, the Estonian economy was on a par with Finland," Wahlberg said. "In other words, if Estonia had benefited from the same opportunities for development as Finland, it would have the same quality of life today."

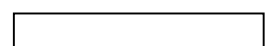
Nonetheless, Estonia's economy is still in better shape than Russia's and that of other Baltic countries: hence its drawing-power.

Estonia "has a very conservative monetary policy," said Wahlberg. "There is no budget deficit. The economy is relatively stable. The Swedes are the biggest investors, followed by Finns, Russians, Germans and Canadians. The proximity of Finland, where Estonia has linguistic and cultural ties, is decisive. Estonia has the means to improve its living standards. But it will take time."

With a population composed of one-third Russians - who arrived in two successive waves, under Stalin and under Brezhnev, and who have no intention of leaving Estonia - the Estonian government considers the problem of asylum-seekers a minor issue in comparison with the influence of ethnic Russians.

"We understand the economic and social problems that Estonia is going through," said Hans Thoolen, UNHCR regional representative for the Nordic countries. "But this policy of dissuasion by detention is intolerable. It is morally unacceptable to imprison asylum-seekers because they have crossed a border illegally. And in any case, in the long term, this policy just doesn't work. When there is even the slightest chance of resettlement in Western countries, you are going to get an influx."

Still, Thoolen feels it would be unrealistic to demand that Estonia ratify the 1951 Convention now. "It would be a good thing, but it isn't a strategic priority for us," he said. "It would take too much time - Parliament has so many laws to pass - and



we need action now. In addition, the example of Russia, which has ratified the Convention and which still mistreats refugees, proves that a signature doesn't solve all the problems."

Resettle the asylum-seekers in the Nordic countries? That's what Salma would like. "There are so few of us," she said. "Why don't they come get us?"

Indeed, there has been strong pressure from the Finnish public and non-governmental organizations, arguing that Finland should accept Estonia's asylum-seekers.

Such a policy "would constitute a pull factor, and the situation could get out of hand quickly," explained Esko Kiuru, who deals with refugee issues at the Finnish Foreign Ministry. "The Estonian question is the tip of an iceberg that's a huge international issue. We cannot let these people hope that they can buy their future with money. We could find ourselves dealing with the thousands of refugees in Moscow. It's Russia's duty to treat its refugees decently."

The Nordic countries have been applying pressure to that end. "The Finnish port authorities help the Estonians," Kiuru said. "There is some improvement. But it's far from perfect. We also help the Russian authorities improve their border service. St. Petersburg also has lots of Third World refugees who would leap at the opportunity to buy a ticket to the West."

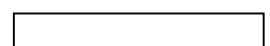
Despite its firm policy, Finland did finally propose to take in these asylum-seekers - so long as UNHCR makes an official request, and if Estonia agrees. Estonia has still not agreed.

Some asylum-seekers have been luckier than Salma and Hassan: they managed to cross the Baltic Sea, often risking their lives. Last winter, 60 asylum-seekers locked in a container on a ferry between Tallinn and Stockholm almost died. A worker in the ship's hold heard muffled sounds coming from the container, and rescued them; a few hours more, and they would have suffocated. Last September, 128 asylum-seekers from Riga arrived in Sweden as stowaways on boats. It was the twelfth "boat-people" vessel to make the journey in two years.

For some, the risk is worth taking. They know that no Nordic country will send them back to the Baltic states, where there is no system to receive asylum-seekers and where, in Estonia's case, they can even be imprisoned.

UNHCR has proposed a way out of this morass. Get the asylum-seekers out of jail. Install them in a decent residency center, with the help of the Nordic countries. And give UNHCR access to them for status determination.

"We are eager to help, and so are the Nordic countries," explained Thoolen. "But no one will be able to as long as these people are in jail and their status remains unclear."



"The difficulty is persuading the Baltic governments that opening a center won't attract a crowd of new asylum-seekers," Thoolen continued. "On the contrary, the message will be clear. Only those who have been determined to be refugees will be able to stay in Estonia; the others will have to be sent back. The attraction of Baltic states as a final destination will be weaker than it is now, when they are considered a transit point for the Nordic countries. They will be a lot less attractive the day asylum-seekers have to look on them as a final destination."

"We can give them the example of Poland," Thoolen added. "Poland has a living standard comparable to Estonia's, and it ceased to become a transit zone for Germany the day it adopted regulations on refugees that allowed Germany to send illegal immigrants back."

Negotiations continue. UNHCR, the Nordic countries and the Estonian government have met several times to try to hammer out a solution to the problem of the detained asylum-seekers.

Some progress was accomplished concerning the treatment of detainees following a meeting in Tallinn October 19. Medical services and food will be improved. Some detainees will be able to reunite with their families in Harju.

But the UNHCR regional bureau in Stockholm was somewhat disappointed to observe that promises concerning the detention of asylum-seekers that the Prime Minister had made one month before had received no follow-up.

Negotiations continue, for the clock is ticking. The asylum-seekers are determined. "If it was just a question of money, we would go back to Iraq," says Salma. "We'd have an apartment, a job, a salary. But we would never be safe. All we want is a bit of land to live in peace, like human beings. When the Estonian guard shoved my mother because she wanted to leave, because she was suffocating in that center - she couldn't take any more, she just wanted to breathe the air by the lakeside - then I felt I was no longer a human being."

Christiane Berthiaume

Conflicts in the Caucasus

When the long-smoldering problem of Nagorno-Karabakh flared up in 1988, it provided a first indication of the many ethnic conflicts to come. This mountain enclave, mostly inhabited by people of Armenian language and origin, had been placed under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction in the 1920s, and was entirely surrounded by villages populated by Azeris. The ethnic strife that erupted there as the Soviet Union broke apart phased quickly into open warfare. Over a million people were forced to flee -- from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia; from Armenia to Azerbaijan;



and from Armenian-occupied sectors of Azerbaijan to other Azeri villages. The colossal scale, and wide-ranging implications, of the nationalities issues that had frozen into quiescence under Soviet rule were now made evident in the world's headlines, along with the suffering, loss and displacement they would cause.

Although the Soviet Union was populated with dozens of nationalities, it was in the Caucasus that the mosaic of intermingled ethnic groups has been most problematic. The first post-Soviet outbreak of ethnic violence to occur on the territory of the Russian Federation itself was in the North Caucasus. In late October 1992, tens of thousands of Ingush were driven out of the disputed Prigorodny district of North Ossetia by Ossetians. (Prior to their deportation by Stalin in 1944, the area had belonged to the Ingush.) The conflict in Chechnya that broke out in December 1994, and which continues to rage, has also placed great strain on neighboring areas of the Russian Federation. In all, some 490,000 people have fled to Ingushetia, Daghestan, North Ossetia and Russia, as well as within Chechnya itself. Many returned during quieter periods, but may well have subsequently been displaced a second time.

But it is in the South Caucasus that the mosaic of peoples has shattered most decisively. In Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, up to 1.5 million people have fled from their homes as a result of ethnic fighting. In Georgia, conflict broke out in 1991 between South Ossetian secessionists and the central Georgian authorities. The following year more fighting erupted with Abkhaz secessionists. Overall, in a country that was once one of the most prosperous republics of the Soviet Union, some 300,000 people have by now been displaced. Another 120,000 people have left for the Russian Federation (though not all as a direct result of conflict).

The enormous scale of displacement, in a region reeling from war damage and the economic after-effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, has hit the Caucasus hard. The region's slumping economies face declining output, rising unemployment, damaged infrastructure, currency depreciation, and the near-collapse of government social welfare programs, along with a swelling population.

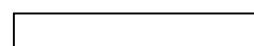
IDPs	
Armenia / Azerbaijan	
Nagorno-Karabakh > Azerbaijan	684,000
Armenia > Armenia	72,000
Georgia	
Abkhazia > Georgia	273,000
S. Ossetia > Georgia	14,000
Russian Federation	
Chechnya > Russian Federation	487,000
N. Ossetia > Ingushetia	25,000
Refugees	

Armenia > Azerbaijan	185,000
Azerbaijan > Armenia	299,000
Uzbekistan > Azerbaijan (Meskhetians)	46,000
Georgia > Armenia	5,000
Georgia > Russian Fed. (refugees / repatriants)	119,000
Russian Federation	
Chechnya > Kazakstan	6,000
Chechnya > Belarus	5,000
Returnees	
Armenia > Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	35,000
Azerbaijan > Azerbaijan (Fizuli)	25,000

Problems of refugees and IDPs in the Caucasus are highly interconnected. The displacement of South Ossetian refugees from Georgia to North Ossetia has impacted on the Ingush-North Ossetian conflict, which drove people out to Ingushetia. Ingushetia has also been badly affected by the conflict in Chechnya (Russian Federation). Displacement from Chechnya also impacts on Daghestan, which has a border with Azerbaijan. One in eight people in Azerbaijan has been forcibly displaced, most as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. In addition, however, Azerbaijan shelters tens of thousands of Muslim Meskhetians, who were deported under Stalin from Georgia to Central Asia, and who have made their way to Azerbaijan, 46,000 of them as a result of ethnic fighting in Uzbekistan; many wish to return to Georgia, but have so far been unable to do so.

With the exception of Chechnya, the other Caucasian conflicts have recently been relatively quiet. However, solutions to the conflicts and displacement have been blocked on all fronts by a failure to make political progress. In the case of the 270,000 displaced people from Abkhazia, efforts to organize repatriation have stalled, after the first 311 returnees, who went back in October 1994, encountered extremely serious security problems, including murder. Despite UN-sponsored proximity talks, the Abkhaz situation remains tense, and there is no consensus on a meaningful timetable for repatriation. Discussions on a solution to the South Ossetia conflict, and a possible return of the refugees (who fled to North Ossetia) and IDPs (who fled elsewhere in Georgia) are also blocked. At the southern end of the Caucasus, some 25,000 Azeri IDPs have managed to return to their homes in the Fizuli area, and 35,000 inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh have returned there from Armenia. However, to date, there has been insufficient political progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute to allow a serious discussion of the question of refugees and return.

Rebuilding Socialism



In Tajikistan, new roofs are sprouting at a bewildering speed in Socialism, the largest of four villages in a collective farm, or *kholkoz*, called Communism. In late 1992, the majority of Socialism's neat mud brick houses were reduced to smoldering ruins. Dozens of other villages in Tajikistan's south-western province of Khatlon were either partially or totally abandoned and destroyed. In some towns and villages the destruction was more selective: a house here, two houses there - a tell-tale sign of specific targeting of certain ethnic or social groups.

Although there was an ethnic element, (Tajikistan has a sizeable Uzbek and smaller Russian, Kyrgyz and Tatar minorities), the conflict was fought mainly on geographically based clan lines. The principal victims were Tajiks living in the south-west who originated from the mountainous northern and eastern regions of Garm and Pamir. Between 20,000 and 40,000 people were killed during the civil war, which began in May 1992 nine months after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

More than half a million were displaced inside the country and, over a period of several weeks beginning in December 1992, 60,000 refugees fled across the icy waters of the Amu river to Afghanistan. In addition, an estimated 50,000 Tajiks of Uzbek origin left for Uzbekistan, at least 3,000 refugees of Kyrgyz origin sought safety in Kyrgyzstan and as many as 20,000 Tajiks of Turkman origin are believed to have integrated locally in Turkmenistan. During the civil war, an unknown number of Tajiks also left for Ukraine, Russia and other CIS countries.

"There were about 750 Garmi houses in this village," says Zo'eer Mahmad Uloyev, a 32-year-old returnee who has been appointed the UNHCR volunteer in Socialism. "Only two were not destroyed, because they belonged to mixed [Uzbek-Garmi] couples. During the fighting about 70 people disappeared. We know for a fact that 12 old men who stayed behind were killed. Other people were caught on the road..."

During the Soviet era, the Central Asian republics were more or less closed to the outside world. At the beginning of 1993, Tajikistan was new territory to UNHCR as well as to most of the rest of the international community.

In December 1992, while UNHCR was busy coping with the Tajik refugees arriving in northern Afghanistan, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) became the first international humanitarian agency to set up an operation inside Tajikistan itself, providing medical assistance to the war-wounded and relief for the internally displaced (IDPs). UNHCR began its Tajikistan operation a month later, followed by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF-Belgium, France and Holland). For the next two years, because of a drastic shortage of other partners willing to launch significant programs in Tajikistan, these agencies, along with the World Food Program (WFP), between them bore almost the entire burden of protection, assistance and initial rehabilitation for the IDPs and returning refugees, as well as making a substantial contribution to the wider peace process.



UNHCR's involvement inside the country of origin from the outset, with a primary motive of smoothing the path for early repatriation, is only one of several unusual characteristics of the Tajikistan operation. Another notable feature has been a strong human rights monitoring role, played out at both local and central government levels, which has complemented UNHCR's traditional protection role for returning refugees. These activities, coupled with considerable cooperation on the part of the government and some local authorities, are generally perceived to have resulted in increased stability and reconciliation in some of the most severely devastated areas in Khatlon - benefiting returning refugees and IDPs alike.

The establishment of conditions sufficiently safe for organized repatriations to take place as soon as possible from Afghanistan - scarcely a safe asylum country - was far from easy. Amra Nuhbegovic, a Bosnian, is a member of the UNHCR mobile field team that covers the Kabodian and Shaartuz districts - the worst-hit area during the civil war. "I arrived in the country in July 1993," she recalls. "During my first field trip to Kabodian, four returnees were murdered. The next time I went to the area, three people were shot and wounded in Shaartuz district. However, we haven't had a murder here since September 1993. The cooperation of the local authorities, police and KGB has improved enormously in Shaartuz and Kabodian. Now, they even react before we hear about an incident, whereas in the early days, UNHCR had to apply a lot of pressure for them to take any action."

Returnees, whether IDPs or refugees, originally faced three types of threat: attacks by local inhabitants who had helped force them out, or who had profited from their absence by taking over their land or occupying their houses; attacks by marauding gangs of bandits exploiting the vacuum of law and order in the immediate aftermath of the civil war; and attacks by the very people who were supposed to be providing the law and order.

While the central government has in general been extremely cooperative in all matters concerning the safety of returnees, the improved situation also owes a lot to a number of dedicated local officials, including Abdulaev Aslanov, the head of Khatlon's Immigration Department, KGB officials in Kumsanghir district and the current chiefs of police and prosecutors in Shaartuz and Kabodian.

"Since I was appointed in January 1993," says Faroukh Nassimov, Chief Prosecutor in Shaartuz, "I have had to deal with two or three cases involving returnees every day." He agrees that matters have improved considerably. "A year ago, everybody could discriminate against returnees, beat them, steal from them. Now it's much better."

Cases range from settling disputes about the ownership of a tractor to apprehending a vicious gang, allegedly headed by a man called Basaliev, who had established a reputation as a ruthless fighter during the civil war. Basaliev and his followers are accused of murdering at least eight people in 1993, all of them refugee or IDP returnees. On one occasion, according to reports received by UNHCR, a couple and their two children were kidnapped by the gang and taken up



into the mountains, where the children and their mother were killed one by one in front of the father. The father was then shot after managing to untie himself and setting fire to the house in which he was being held prisoner. On another occasion, two returnee women were reported missing by UNHCR. It turned out that they had been taken by the same group, raped, sexually assaulted, tortured with cigarettes and decapitated. Finally, in September 1993, UNHCR reported that two young men had gone missing.

When two gang members were captured in December 1993, they confessed to murdering the two missing men. Three more people, including Basaliev, who had been on the run since December, were arrested in May 1994. In June, Chief Prosecutor Nassimov presented the case before the court of first instance and all five of the accused were convicted of murder. The case then passed on to the regional court where, unless the verdicts are overturned, sentence will be passed.

Nowadays, most of the cases coming before Nassimov are more routine. Refugees and IDPs in Tajikistan, as in many other countries around the world, often return home to find other people living in their houses. UNHCR frequently brings cases concerning occupied houses to the attention of the authorities. On 6 October, a UNHCR volunteer - one of whom is appointed in each village containing a sizeable number of returnees - came to the UNHCR field office in Shaartuz to report the 64th occupied-house case recorded by UNHCR in Shaartuz and Kabodian. Of these, 30 had by that date been successfully resolved, with the house returned to its original owner, a process made simpler by a special law concerning occupied houses that was passed by the Tajik Parliament at the beginning of 1993.

Associate Field Officer Amra Nuhbegovic immediately made a preliminary inspection herself and then reported the case to the police. Depending on whether or not the occupier voluntarily makes way for the original owners, who were due to return during the next organized repatriation from Afghanistan, the case may end up being decided by the chief prosecutor. A functioning and reliable legal system is vital to the protection of returnees, and in Shaartuz, Kabodian and some - but not all - of the returnee districts in Khatlon, the system is in general functioning well - despite the many security problems still occurring in the country at large. As Chief Prosecutor Nassimov puts it, "Freeing one occupied house or arresting a killer is worth much more than empty statements at grand meetings."

One of the worst examples of harassment by supposed forces of law and order involved a rogue unit of troops that took up residence in the returnee transit center in Kabodian, along with a tank, and began threatening, robbing and beating up returnees and anyone else who happened to cross their path. After repeated protests to the local authorities had failed to dislodge them, UNHCR's chief of mission in Dushanbe, Pierre-François Pirlot, took up the matter with the central government and threatened to suspend organized repatriation to the area. As a result, the troops were finally removed.

According to Chief Prosecutor Nassimov, UNHCR's proactive human rights monitoring and protection roles have helped considerably in the battle to restore



the rule of law in a shattered land: "UNHCR plays an important role. When UNHCR suggests the authorities do something, maybe we do it quicker than we would otherwise. When UNHCR brings a problem to our attention, it places us under an obligation to react. For example, in situations like the one involving the soldiers and the tank, I do not have the authority to resolve the problem."

In Socialism, which is in Kabodian district, Zo'eer Uloyev has had first-hand experience both of the early protection problems and the subsequent improvements. After fleeing to nearby mountains in late 1992, he and his family made their way to Dushanbe. On 19 March 1993, he was among the first group of displaced people to return home.

"There were about 500 of us. When we arrived at the railway station here, we were surrounded by a group of about 200 people armed with sticks and stones, who were trying to prevent us from returning to our homes." An ugly stand-off ensued, with UNHCR, the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the ICRC playing a vital role in ensuring that the local authorities did their utmost to resolve the situation. However, despite a protective cordon provided by the local militia, the incident ended in tragedy. "Although the militia defended us, and nobody was killed or beaten, we had to spend eight days in the station, and 16 people - mainly children - died of cold or hunger."

Once Zo'eer and the others had finally escaped from the station and returned to their gutted houses, there were still incidents when returnees' tents were stoned or burned. The worst such incident took place on 26 February 1994, when a dispute over land between the Uzbek and returnee Garmi communities in Socialism turned into a running battle involving over 100 people. The police arrived in force and managed to stop the fighting, but not before eight people were so seriously injured they had to be taken to hospital. UNHCR staff were present at the scene, helped tend the injured and played a major role in the ensuing attempts to promote reconciliation between the two groups.

Socialism was placed under a curfew for a week and the police carried out a lengthy and thorough investigation. "The authorities really supported us," says Zo'eer. "Since then they have arranged meetings virtually every day. Both groups are invited to attend and are encouraged to talk to each other and air their grievances."

For many of the returnees, this incident felt like the final straw and initially many of them wanted to leave Socialism. "But when they saw that the authorities were coming every day, and now that UNHCR has given them building materials, they have decided to stay," says Zo'eer. "Now the atmosphere is much better than before. If an Uzbek is getting married, lots of Garmis attend the wedding, and vice versa."

In March 1993, a joint UNHCR/ICRC survey identified 17,000 destroyed houses in Khatlon province. Some were completely razed to the ground; others had lost their roofs, and had gaping holes in place of doors and windows. As part of its



rehabilitation program, UNHCR decided to provide both the refugees repatriating from Afghanistan and returning IDPs with materials - wooden beams, roofing sheets, and nails - to rebuild their roofs.

Despite a constant shortfall in funding that has plagued the Tajikistan operation, and has contributed to serious delays in the rebuilding program, new roofs are starting to appear all over Khatlon.

In Socialism, more than 3,300 of the 3,500 people who fled had returned by late October, and Save the Children Fund (USA) is supervising a Food for Work (FFW) program, under which houses are reconstructed by 23 "brigades," each consisting of 12 or 13 men. Of a total of 640 destroyed houses in Socialism, 169 had already been rebuilt by the FFW brigades by 28 October. In all, it is hoped that 13,200 houses will be completed in Khatlon province by the end of 1994.

"In spite of everything that has happened," says Zo'eer, "I am an optimist. There is only one school in the village, and only one cemetery. These are shared by both groups. One of my father's neighbors gave back two [looted] TVs, a refrigerator and a sofa. Some of our neighbors were good like that. I think they felt ashamed."

Asked if he can envisage the day when a Garmi will marry an Uzbek in Socialism, Zo'eer pauses a long time. "That's a very difficult question," he says finally. After another long pause for thought, he smiles dryly and shakes his head. "No, I can't see a Garmi marrying an Uzbek in this village - not in the near future."

A lot has been achieved in a short time in Tajikistan, due to a number of factors: the cooperation of the government, and its desire to see a speedy repatriation; the desire of the refugees themselves to return from a dangerous situation in northern Afghanistan (where between 30 and 50 refugees have been killed in the cross-fire between different Afghan factions); the free flow of information about the situation inside Tajikistan from family and friends to the refugees, by means of a regular UNHCR-operated postal service between the two countries; and a well-run, dynamic program that incorporates many of the new ideas that have emerged in UNHCR over the past few years.

Nevertheless, many problems remain. In some areas, especially Kurgan Tyube, tensions are still running high and the local authorities appear not to care about the protection of returnees. Nevertheless, by the end of 1994 most of the refugees who wish to return from Afghanistan will have done so, with the rest likely to return in the spring of 1995. The roofing program should be completed shortly after the last refugees return, and UNHCR will by then have started to phase down its program.

Although more NGOs, such as Relief International, the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children Fund (USA), started setting up substantive operations during the latter part of 1994, there are still far too few players committed to taking up the baton during the vital transition period between initial rehabilitation and longer term development. Tajikistan's economic situation is not



far short of catastrophic. Its infrastructure is badly decayed, and the water, sanitation and health sectors are in chronic condition.

"What we have done can be ruined overnight if the economy continues to plummet and everything explodes," says Chief of Mission Pirlot. "People need employment. They need hope. It's a very volatile mixture. If they don't get hope, they'll explode again. They will have nothing to lose."

With the principal exceptions of the United States - which has strongly supported UNHCR's otherwise extremely under-funded program and provided some bilateral aid - and the Russian Federation, which has provided the majority of the peace-keeping troops patrolling the troublesome border with Afghanistan, the international community has so far largely ignored Tajikistan.

Despite the acute shortage of funds, UNHCR and its new NGO partners have launched a number of income-generating and Quick Impact Projects in an attempt to breathe some wisps of economic life into returnee communities. But the problems in Tajikistan are crying out for more attention. And so far, they have been resoundingly ignored by the world at large. If Tajikistan does slide back into chaos once again, this may appear in retrospect as a clear case of criminal neglect.

If, on the other hand, the momentum of reconstruction, reconciliation and development can be maintained and expanded, Tajikistan may recover from its crippling internal problems and bring some much-needed stability to Central Asia. Then one day a Garmi will perhaps, after all, marry an Uzbek in a small village called Socialism, in the kholkoz of Communism, in a little-known but exceptionally beautiful country called Tajikistan.

Rupert Colville

