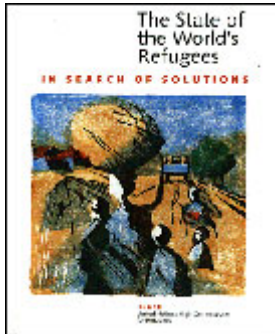


History – 15-18 years Teacher Resources



IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS



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"Changing approaches to the refugee problem", Chapter 1, Box 1.1 (p. 24-25)

Displaced people in the former Soviet states

Since the collapse of the communist regime in 1991, millions of former Soviet citizens have migrated within and between the 15 successor states of the USSR. Some have been uprooted by armed conflict, while others have moved to look for new economic opportunities, to escape from discrimination or to go back to areas from which they or their ancestors had been displaced in the past. At the same time, the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have experienced a growing influx of people from other parts of the world, many of them migrants and asylum seekers who are in transit to Western Europe.

The Soviet Union was well acquainted with involuntary migrations. In the 70 years of its existence, millions of people were forcibly transferred or induced to move from one part of the country to another. Such relocations had a number of different objectives: to reinforce governmental control of the country; to eliminate perceived threats to the communist state; to punish dissident individuals and disloyal ethnic groups; and to promote economic development in inhospitable and sparsely populated areas of the USSR.

For most of its history the Soviet Union remained closed to outsiders, and so these



massive population displacements (unlike the fate of some prominent individual dissidents) attracted relatively little international attention. The forced migrations of the past few years, however, have been widely publicized by the media and have aroused the concern of neighbouring and nearby states, which fear the consequences of continued instability and refugee movements in the region.

Armed conflict

The CIS states which have been most troubled by armed conflict and refugee movements are to be found in two principal areas: the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the Caucasus, the government of Georgia has been confronted with two secessionist struggles, both of which have led to large-scale population movements. The war for the independence of South Ossetia, which began in 1989, has created some 36,000 internally displaced people and 120,000 refugees, the majority of whom have fled to Russia. The conflict in Abkhazia, which broke out in 1992, has led to the internal displacement of 270,000 people, while a further 80,000 have fled to Russia and other CIS states.

The Caucasus region is also the scene of a protracted war involving the newly independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The focus of this conflict is Nagorno-Karabakh, an area populated primarily by ethnic Armenians, but which was placed under the control of Azerbaijan during the Stalinist period. Now in its seventh year, the struggle for control of Nagorno-Karabakh and the related war between Armenia and Azerbaijan have displaced an estimated 1.6 million people.

More recently, in the Russian Federation, armed conflict between the central authorities and the breakaway republic of Chechnya has led to the displacement of half a million people, many of them fleeing to the neighbouring autonomous republics of the Federation. UNHCR's relief operation in the area, which was launched at the beginning of 1995, is the first UN humanitarian operation to be carried out on Russian territory.

Of the five Central Asian republics, Tajikistan has been most seriously affected by armed conflict and population displacements. A civil war erupted in that country in 1992, with one side frequently characterized as Islamic and the other as neo-communist. As a result of the violence, 600,000 people were displaced within the country while another 250,000 took refuge in Afghanistan, Russia and other neighbouring states.

Operational problems

Providing protection and assistance to these and other displaced populations in the former Soviet Union has proved to be a challenging task. Very large numbers of people are involved, concentrated in numerous different locations. UNHCR staff and other humanitarian personnel have had to work in an entirely new political and operational environment, where the language, culture, legal and political systems are all unfamiliar.

The political and economic disruption which has created the refugee problem has at the same time made it very difficult to establish effective relief programmes. The region's physical infrastructure is unreliable and its institutions generally lack the capacity to respond to urgent humanitarian needs. Many of the region's displaced people have found shelter in private homes and public amenities, placing further pressure on local incomes and living standards.



In these circumstances, UNHCR's primary concern has been to resolve existing refugee problems and to avert further population displacements. These objectives have been achieved to some extent in Tajikistan, where most of the refugees and internally displaced people have now returned to their homes. Nevertheless, the country is still affected by political instability and sporadic fighting, leaving thousands of people in precarious circumstances.

In the Caucasus, the situation is even more disturbing. By mid-1995, little progress had been made in settling the Abkhazia conflict, leading to a suspension of plans for the large-scale repatriation of ethnic Georgians. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, a six-month UNHCR emergency programme launched in 1993 has had to be extended because of the continuation of the conflict and the absence of any immediate prospect for repatriation.

Returns and arrivals

An estimated two million people have moved to Russia from other CIS states since 1989, prompted by a number of different motivations: for economic motives, to escape from armed conflicts, or because they fear persecution and discrimination in the countries where they live.

During the communist period, Russians were a privileged elite who wielded the most authority, held the best jobs, and enjoyed a cultural and linguistic dominance within the Soviet Union. Now, however, some of the newly independent states are abandoning Russian as the official language and have introduced discriminatory measures against the Russians in an attempt to redress historic grievances. Roughly a quarter of the people who have moved to Russia since 1989 have been recognized as refugees or forced migrants, the largest numbers coming from Tajikistan, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

In addition to the population movements which have taken place within and between the newly independent states, an estimated 700,000 people have found their way to the territory of the former Soviet Union from other parts of the world, including a substantial number of Chinese citizens. A large majority are believed to be economic migrants en route to the West. However, with the introduction of measures intended to limit the number of people who can enter Western Europe, many of these transit migrants have essentially become trapped in the CIS area.

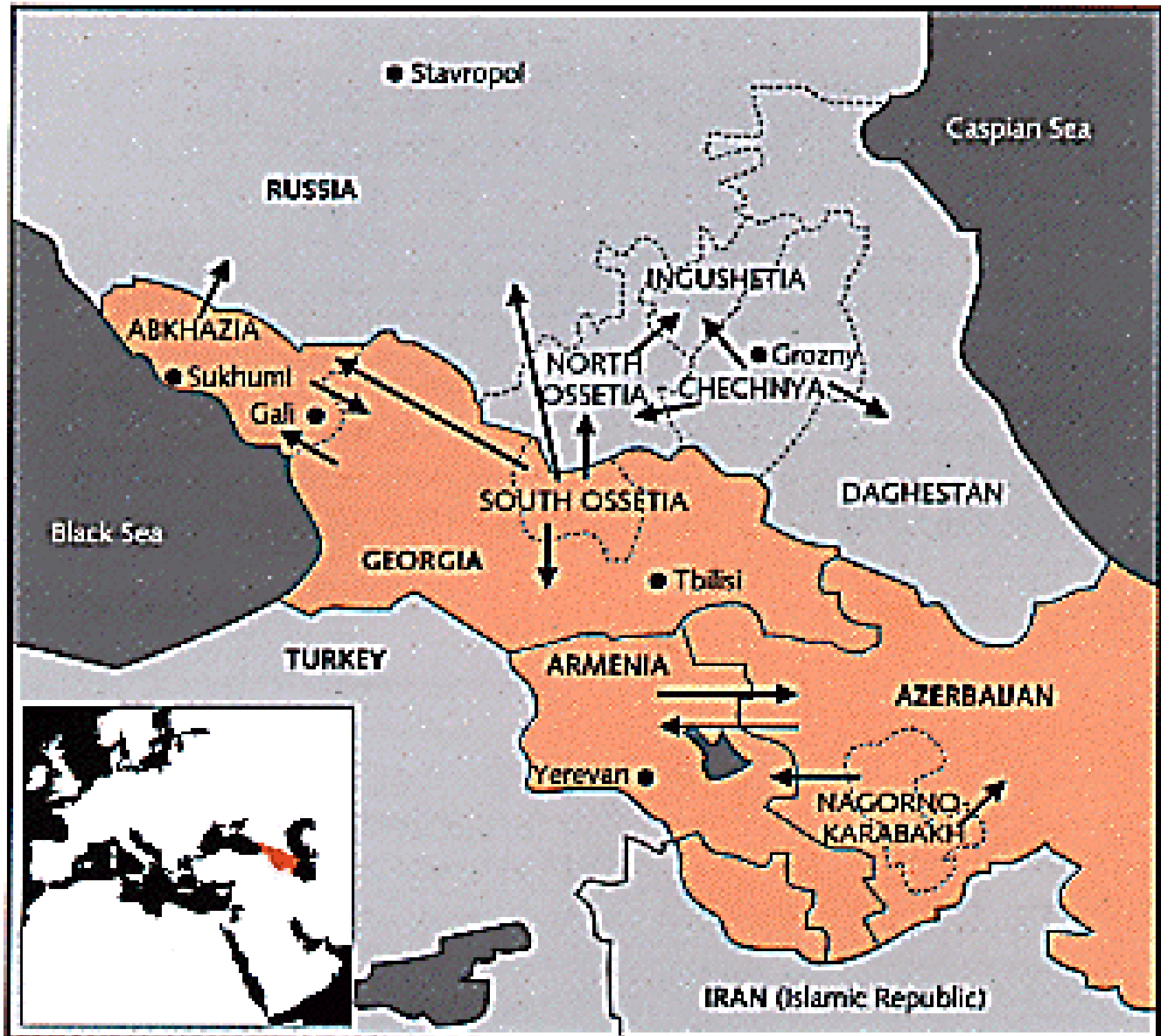
The imprecision of these figures is indicative of the fact that the CIS states currently lack the procedures required to determine whether asylum seekers qualify for refugee status. Moreover, the process of drafting immigration and refugee regulations, training staff to administer these laws and establishing an effective working relationship with UNHCR and other international organizations is only just beginning.

In order to tackle the problem of displacement in the region, UNHCR is organizing a major international conference, which will bring together the governments of the CIS and relevant neighbouring states, as well as the International Organization for Migration, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other international organizations working in the area. Provisionally planned for the end of 1995, this initiative will also enable the refugee problem in the former Soviet states to be addressed from a regional perspective.



Map B

Cross-border population displacements in the Caucasus region



Restoring Stability to Tajikistan

Tajikistan's civil war aroused barely a flicker of international interest when fighting broke out in May 1992. The country had existed as an independent state for only nine months, and prior to that it had been almost completely closed to the outside world. With Afghanistan to the south, China to the east, and the vast expanse of the former Soviet Union to the north and west, Tajikistan was - and still is - difficult to reach and easy to ignore.

Since the tentative conclusion of the conflict in January 1993, Tajikistan has been the scene of a particularly innovative UNHCR programme. Unfortunately, the organization's efforts have been plagued by persistent funding difficulties. Nevertheless, with the firm support of a small group of donor states, UNHCR has been able to implement a strategy which combines the search for solutions with the protection of returnees and displaced people and the prevention of further population displacements.

A brutal war

The civil war in Tajikistan - a complex conflict with ethnic, ideological and religious dimensions - was short but extremely brutal. Between 20,000 and 40,000 people were killed. Half a million were displaced inside the country and 60,000 fled across the Amu river to Afghanistan. In the south-western province of Khatlon, which bore the brunt of the fighting, dozens of villages were razed. Many other villages, and most of the towns, bore the hallmarks of persecution. While certain houses were burned down or reduced to a pile of mud bricks, others were left intact.

The people displaced by the conflict were mainly ethnic Tajiks, who constitute just under 60 per cent of the country's five million inhabitants. Between the 1930s and the early 1970s, thousands of people were moved from the Garm valley in central Tajikistan to the south-west of the country, where the communist regime was seeking to boost the production of cotton. The descendants of these settlers, known as Garmis and Pamiris, were the principal group to be forced out of Khatlon during the civil war.

Many thousands of ethnic minority members, including Russians, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Jews and Germans, have also left Tajikistan since the country gained independence in 1991. Although for the most part not directly involved in the civil war, they moved to other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States because they were afraid of being caught in the crossfire, or because they wanted to look for new economic opportunities. Tajikistan's economy - the poorest in the former Soviet Union - is in a disastrous state. During the winters of 1993 and 1994, for example, the situation became so bad that some people were reportedly reduced to eating grass.

Despite the deep-rooted problems which still affect Tajikistan, including continued clashes between the government and its opponents, by mid-1995 all but 18,000 of



the refugees and 12,500 of the internally displaced people had returned to their homes, mainly in Khatlon. Some 14,500 houses have been repaired with roofing materials paid for, imported and delivered by UNHCR. Villages which only a year earlier were devastated and abandoned have now sprung back to life.

But it takes more than a new roof to convince a refugee that it is safe to go back home, particularly in the circumstances of Tajikistan's civil war. For in many cases, the returnees are once again living next door to the people who forced them out of their homes, stole their possessions and killed their relatives. Important though UNHCR's shelter programme has been, the key to the refugees' return lies in the dramatic improvement in the security situation in Khatlon, a development which in turn owes much to the strong protection role assumed by UNHCR staff in the area.

Early repatriation

The Tajik influx into northern Afghanistan occurred in December 1992, during the last few weeks of the civil war. By January 1993, UNHCR had deployed a mobile team on the Tajik side of the border, so that the organization could prepare for an early repatriation programme and help the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide emergency assistance to large numbers of internally displaced people.

The reason why some people became refugees while others were displaced within Tajikistan was quite arbitrary. Those who could tended to flee to the capital city of Dushanbe. But those who found themselves on the wrong side of a front-line were forced south and into Afghanistan. Since the beginning of the UNHCR programme in Tajikistan, the organization has provided protection and assistance to both groups on an equal basis.

Establishing conditions that were conducive to the return of the refugees and displaced people was far from easy. Initially, the rule of law in post-war Khatlon was negligible. The first returnees were vulnerable not only to victorious neighbours, who were intent on keeping any property they had stolen, but also to a formidable array of armed groups that were roaming around with virtual impunity. These included some of the semi-official militias which had helped the government to fight and win the war, and who were now (often literally) drunk on victory. The extent of this problem became clear during June and July 1993, when a number of returnees were murdered, robbed or beaten up by armed gangs.

UNHCR's mobile teams, operating from bases in the most devastated areas of Khatlon, followed up such incidents and drew the attention of the local authorities to potentially dangerous developments.

If the response to such representations was inadequate, the matter was taken up with the relevant ministries in Dushanbe.

In some particularly tense situations, the prompt deployment of UNHCR staff



helped to ensure that the local authorities provided protection to the returnees. In addition, UNHCR encouraged the authorities and local leaders to ensure that disputes were settled through negotiation, rather than the use of violence. In criminal cases involving organized gangs or armed individuals, UNHCR staff monitored the judicial process to ensure that attacks on returnees did not go unpunished. By 1994, more and more such cases were coming to court and the problem of the rogue militias was subsiding, enabling UNHCR to establish an organized repatriation programme from Afghanistan.

In addition to these activities, UNHCR has been working in close cooperation with the government of Tajikistan to establish legislation relating to refugees and returnees. Thus in April 1993, Tajikistan passed the first in a series of amnesty laws. In November 1993 the country acceded to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. And in 1994 the Tajik parliament passed a special law concerning house occupancy. These legal instruments have to a large extent been respected, with the result that returnees are now rarely subject to any kind of official harassment.

Tajikistan as a whole is still plagued by political instability and a dangerously debilitated economy. A further collapse into armed conflict cannot be entirely discounted. Nevertheless, by mid-1995, the returnee areas of Khatlon Province were generally recognized to be safer than the streets of Dushanbe. With its task approaching completion, UNHCR is now planning to hand over some of the activities which it has initiated to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the UN Development Programme.

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 Mahmud 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."

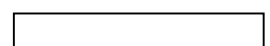
In Socialism, which is in Kabodian district, Zo'eer Uloyev has had first-hand experience both of the early protection problems and the subsequent improvements. After fleeing to nearby mountains in late 1992, he and his family made their way to Dushanbe. On 19 March 1993, he was among the first group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

