

DREF operation



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Russian Federation: Assistance to refugees from South Ossetia

DREF operation n° MDRRU003
22 August, 2008

The International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) is a source of un-earmarked money created by the Federation in 1985 to ensure that immediate financial support is available for Red Cross and Red Crescent response to emergencies. The DREF is a vital part of the International Federation's disaster response system and increases the ability of national societies to respond to disasters.

CHF 250,000 (USD 238,095 or EUR 152,905) has been allocated from the International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the National Society in delivering immediate assistance to up to 10,000 beneficiaries. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.

Summary:

This operation aims to support the immediate initiatives of the Russian Red Cross to provide assistance to the refugees on Russian territory who escaped the hostilities in South Ossetia, which started in the second week of August. The assistance will focus on the social and psychological needs of the refugees staying in refugee centres, with host families or temporarily accommodated in institutions. Special attention will be given to separated families, unaccompanied minors and targeted host families.

The support assumes a gradual return of the refugees and is expected to be implemented over a period of 6 months and will therefore be completed by 28 February, 2009. A final report will be made available three months after the end of the operation (by 31 May, 2009).



Psychosocial workers of the Russian Red Cross from Beslan organize art sessions for refugee children in the dining room of Alagir refugee centre. Photo: International Federation

[<click here for contact details,](#)
[or here to view the map of the affected area>](#)

The situation

Tens of thousands of civilians were caught up in the armed conflict involving Georgian, South Ossetian and Russian forces. According to Russian authorities some 30,000 people fled the fighting in South Ossetia with North Ossetia hosting the majority of the refugees. Since registration appeared problematic and many of the refugees are still moving around the humanitarian situation is difficult to assess. Most of the refugees are

registered in a tented transit camp in Alagir from where they are provided with further shelter in eight schools, dormitories and other institutions throughout the Republic of North Ossetia in Vladikavkaz, Beslan and Alagir. The majority however moved to host families.

Most of them just survived the hostilities and are under severe stress and suffer from fear and loneliness. They lost contacts with family and friends. Hundreds of people have died in the conflict and many feel grief over the loss of relatives. In the camps people have just to wait, without having access to information and limited possibilities to get in contact with their loved ones.

Coordination and partnerships

The overall coordination of all humanitarian assistance on the Russian side is conducted by the Ministry for Extraordinary Situations (EMERCOM). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the lead agency of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's humanitarian response in the conflict zone. It has launched a preliminary emergency appeal for 8 million Swiss francs to meet the emergency needs of around 50,000 people affected by the armed conflict.

The Russian Red Cross, in particular the Vladikavkaz branch, took up its responsibilities to support the incoming refugees from the onset of the conflict, working in close collaboration with ICRC. The activities, which will be supported by the current DREF allocation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, are complementary to other humanitarian actions and have been agreed upon with EMERCOM, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ICRC.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

At the onset of the arrival of refugees from South Ossetia, the Russian Red Cross started to mobilize its volunteers in the branches of Vladikavkaz and Beslan. The volunteers cooperated in the reception of the refugees and the distribution of relief goods which were brought in not only by ICRC and the Red Cross, but also by other NGOs. In each refugee centre hygiene parcels, bed linen and food items were distributed. There was no food shortage, but the humid and cold weather conditions at night were causing a high demand for basic hygiene items, underwear and warm clothes. The Russian Red Cross gave special attention to the sheltering of 750 unaccompanied minors with the assistance of its branches in the region.

When the refugees began flocking in, about 16 staff and 50 volunteers involved in assisting the people affected by the Beslan school attack in 2004 were mobilized from the Beslan area for psychosocial care. The support was offered to ensure minimum comfort for the arriving refugees with a special focus on children and unaccompanied minors. As Beslan is not far from Georgia and Ossetia, the staff and volunteers have the advantage of speaking the local language, as many of the refugees do not speak Russian. The support aims at enabling the affected people to deal with the traumas caused by the loss of family members and friends and the loss of all securities.

With the start of the crisis, the Russian Red Cross headquarters opened a bank account facilitating donations for the people affected by the armed conflict and started to collect in-kind goods as well. Branches all over the country are equally active.

The needs

Besides the direct aid provided by the government through EMERCOM and ICRC, other organizations are assisting with food and basic items. ICRC is providing hygiene parcels and other items to meet the basic needs of the people affected. An emergency hospital set up by EMERCOM is being withdrawn as the normal healthcare facilities are restored.

There is a strong need for psychological rehabilitation for the refugees who fled from their homes in South Ossetia and are separated from their families. However not only the refugees, but also the families hosting refugees will need guidance to cope with the stress this goodwill entails. In this regard, the Red Cross is well placed to provide such psychosocial support (PSS) as its key activity in this disaster response operation. This planned response builds on the profound regional experience of providing PSS after the Beslan hostage crisis. However the staff and volunteers lack the means to cover the costs and to scale up the activities by involving new staff and volunteers in the coming months.

The National Society headquarters is also in need of strengthening its capacity to communicate with the public. Fund-raising activities have started and donations are being collected, but the public understanding

on what the Red Cross does and how it works is still limited. Efforts are needed to inform the public on the needs of goods and to train a sufficient number of volunteers to replace the staff (dearly needed to lead the operation) presently carrying out the tasks of the volunteers.

The proposed operation

The refugees can be divided into three age-specific groups – children, teenagers and adults. Their needs for psychosocial support are similar but each group has its own specific needs. Children feel disintegrated, the teens are suffering from rage outburst and are willing to take revenge on those who made them leave their homes, adult women are stressed with a burden of responsibility they need to carry alone while their husband are away.

Psychosocial support and counseling

Objective: The effects of the war have been minimized among children and their families displaced from South Ossetia.

The Russian Red Cross PSS team, consisting of 16 staff members from Vladikavkaz and Beslan branches and around 50 volunteers, will carry out the following activities:

Activities planned:

- Provide psychosocial support to about 5,000 affected individuals and families, both refugees and hosting families
- Conduct targeted assistance to the host families in order to reduce the negative impact of care for the refugees
- Organize teams of psychologists and nurses in Vladikavkaz and Beslan to accompany the affected families as they deal with needs or obligations related to the tragedy including visits to cemeteries, organizing activities, and the continuation of education
- Provide social support to the refugees, forced to stay for several months away from their homes, in order to maintain the conditions close to their usual life. They will be assisted in restoring missing documents, solving legal issues, admission to education, applying for government support or compensation.

Capacity building in psychosocial support delivery

Objective: The capacity of the Russian Red Cross and its branches to continue and expand the service following the evolving needs of the refugees, and to train volunteers among the refugees to facilitate self-care has increased.

Taking into account that the capital of South Ossetia, Tskinvalli is almost destroyed, many of the refugees will spend several months away from their homes and families, until the restoration works are completed. Children will have to start the scholar year in other schools. In order to facilitate continued care, the Russian Red Cross will conduct the following activities:

Activities planned:

- Create PSS and self-support groups for those affected by the hostilities
- Train selected volunteers to continue the activities related to psychosocial support

The support will be mainly in contributing to specified expenditures related to the activities for reaching the goal. Simple administrative procedures will be developed to monitor the expenses in relation to the outcomes of the activities for accountability purposes. The operational period is expected to be 6 months.

Capacity building

A professional consultant will be deployed in the field to guide the PSS volunteers and professionals in their work with refugees and to help them prevent professional burnout. The experience of the Red Cross operation in the aftermath of the South Ossetia conflict will be documented in the form of a film that can be

used to document and present the activities of the staff and volunteers, capture lessons learned and used as a teaching material for further training.

The media will be approached with the purpose of making visible this specific task of the Red Cross and to create interest and potential volunteers for PSS activities.

Advocacy and Public Information

In cooperation with ICRC and the International Federation, the Russian Red Cross will organize a trip to North Ossetia for the media to provide better visibility and public understanding of its activities and to increase the image of the National Society in order to increase the number of volunteers.

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

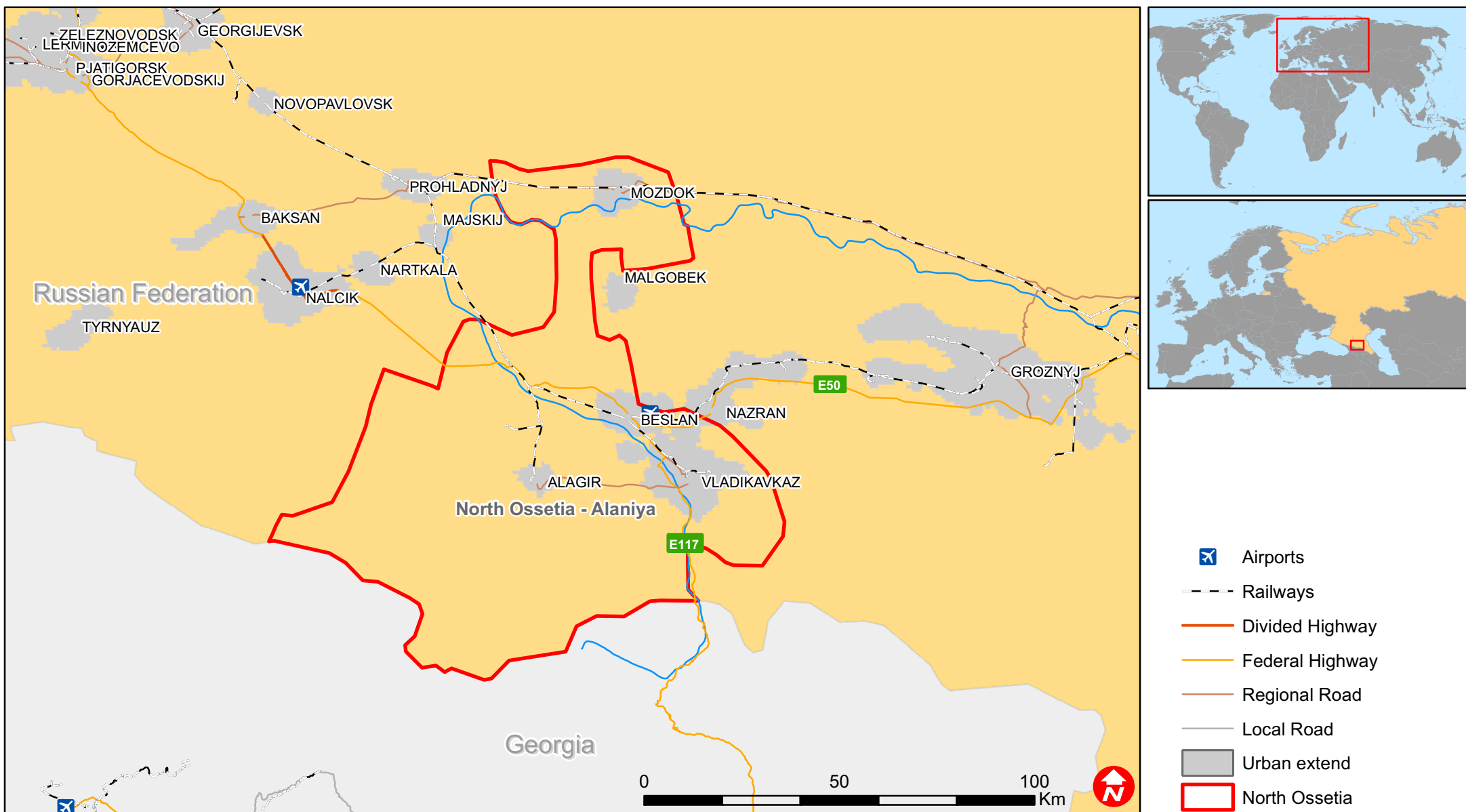
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[<Map below; click here to return to the title page>](#)



Russian Federation: Population movement



The maps used do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies or National Societies concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities.

Map data sources: ESRI, DEVINFO, International Federation, MDRRU003.mxd