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**Interethnic Relations in School Education as one of the factors for the ethnic conflicts in North Caucasus republics.<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

Paper presents some results of the program “Children in Risk” conducted by Open Society Institute in 7 North Caucasus republics since 2007. All these republics have characterized by different demographic processes, especially migration as internal and external. Ethnic composition of population is also different and purification processes in all republics as result of press out minorities ethnic groups and Russian speaking population created conflict situation and provoked tensions and forced migration. In different republics the problems with education are different. Chechnya and Ingushetia are the republics that more affected by ethnic conflicts and wars, which called now “anti terrorist operations”. Children of local population and forced migrants often dropped out of education such military activities. They also suffered because of local governments’ education experiments with language of education. For the last 15 years the alphabet in Chechnya was several times changed from Cyrillic to Arabic, after to Latin and returned to Russian again. The other problems are typical for education in North Ossetia. They related to children of refugees of the first and second South Ossetia – Georgia wars in 1991 and 2008, which have not solved yet. The refugees of first wave (1991) are not fully accepted by North Ossetia population and often dropped out of education and marginalized. Many of them are from Georgia and are not able to speak Ossetian and Russian properly. Teachers are also not able to speak Georgian. In Dagestan as the most ethnically diverse and high mountains region the communication language is often Russian but because of ethnic tensions Russian teachers fled and nobody can replace them and teach Russian. The school program curricular in Russian taught by local teachers at different local languages depends of their native language in villages. Children often do not know properly as own language and Russian. In other republics which have not been affected by wars so much (Karachai-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Adigea) the main problems with education related mainly with social-economic opportunities of society. The traditionally patriarchal style of life of population after collapse of USSR has dramatically changed. Poor socio-economic situation forced population to migrate and traditionally big families there now often without one or two parents. Such rapid transformation leads to homelessness of many children, drug usage and rise of criminality. The renaissance of Islam and wide spread development of religious education involves more and more

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The main findings were presented in Molodikova I.(2008) Education Provisions for Children at Risk: Needs Assessment for North Caucasian Region (Adygheya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania and Chechnya), OSI, Budapest.

youth. They are easily mobilized by some extremists groups which often use ethnic or religious ground for the formation of militant groups.

## Introduction

*“In Chechnya now – rural values prevail over urban. A half-educated and ignorant boy with a gun is more respected than an elderly person, a thief is more successful than an honest farmer, and the opinion of a village mullah is more influential than the rule of law.”<sup>2</sup>*

This study examines the education of children at-risk in the Northern Caucasus republics. This study discussed the findings within the larger issues of access to and quality of education provision in the Northern Caucasus Republics of the Russian Federation, including Adygheya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania, and Chechnya.

The Northern Caucasus is one of the most disadvantaged regions of the Russian Federation. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Northern Caucasus republics have experienced major economic decline, increasing levels of poverty, and high unemployment rates, all of which have been further aggravated by prolonged military hostilities and ethnic tension. The political, economic, and social instability of the 1990s and 2000s have led to the rapid deterioration of education provision, and placed many children and youth at risk of having limited or no access to education.

The Northern Caucasus is a multiethnic region, a crossroads of cultures and interests, with the hopes and interests of many, diverse ethnic groups leading to much conflict. Northern Caucasus republics border Georgia and Azerbaijan (see Figure 1). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, relations between Russia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have become increasingly complicated. During the last 15 years, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Northern Caucasus Republics (NRC) of the Russian Federation have experienced war and other conflicts, leading to deterioration of living conditions, economic crises, and a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In some of the republics of the Northern Caucasus, militia activities occur nearly every week, and conflicts between different ethnic groups and/or local warlords and the federal center erupt on a regular basis.

While the Northern Caucasus republics mirror general problems of education development related to the post-Soviet transition processes the depth and breadth of these problems is often far more pronounced in the Northern Caucasus region. In addition, the Northern Caucasus republics face region-specific education problems such as post-conflict trauma and deteriorating quality of Russian-language instruction, a lack of preschool education, widespread corruption in schools and high education system, and deteriorating school infrastructure. Combined, these multiple problems put children and

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<sup>2</sup> Tishkov, V., *Obschestvo v vooruzennom konflikte [Society in an armed conflict]*. (Moscow: Nauka, 2001): p. 533.

youth in the Northern Caucasus republics at risk, further hindering socioeconomic development, political stability, and social cohesion of the Northern Caucasus republics. (World Bank, 2006). This makes children and youth in the Northern Caucasus republics especially disadvantaged, negatively affecting their future education and employment opportunities.

While every republic has its own combination of groups of children at-risk, this study has identified some commonalities across the region. The most frequently identified groups of children at-risk include (1) children from low-income and poor families, (2) victims of military conflicts and ethnic tensions, (3) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), (4) children with disabilities and health problems, and (5) children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families. (6) female pupils opportunities to finish education

**Figure 1.** Map of the Northern Caucasus



This study investigates education of at-risk children through a combination of different methodological approaches to account for the complexity of the political, economic, and social context of the Northern Caucasus region. In particular, the study draws on (1) structural interviews with 46 education experts in the field of education, (2) focus groups with more than 125 school teachers, (3) qualitative analysis of reflection essays written by teachers about the changing status of education during the transition period, and (4) an analysis of the existing statistical data (5). In-depth interviews with teachers on some education problems. Most data was collected since the summer and early fall of 2007 till spring 2009.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In particular, expert interviews and focus groups were conducted in May-June, 2007, while essays were collected and analyzed during the first two weeks of September, 2007.

## **1. The Impact of Political, Economic, and Social Factors on educational opportunities as resource for conflicts in the Northern Caucasus**

**The historical memory is very strong in the republics of the region.** From the long war for conquest of the Caucasus (1818-1864) and deportation of some mountaineer nations (the Balkars, the Ingush, the Karachai, the Chechens, the Meskhetian Turks) during the World War II onwards and in result of arbitrary changes of administrative-territorial boundaries and state borders in the 1920s-1950s areas of nations' settlement in many instances stopped to coincide with boundaries of administrative-territorial formations and many nations (the Ingush, the Chechens, the Nogai, the Lezgins) has emerged from this protracted turmoil as 'divided' nations. Nowadays areas of settlement of more than 140 ethnic groups do not coincide with the official boundaries of national territorial and administrative-territorial formations that exist in the region. Hence the territorial disputes. In the process of long co-existence of many nations within the limited geographical expanse (this co-existence was connected with numerous conflicts, albeit latent or suppressed ones) in the greater part of Northern Caucasus republics different ethnic communities advance claims to the historical, hereditary possession of some territories. Numerous migration moves of ethnic groups caused by disintegration of the USSR and hostilities combined with the previous historical events are the cause of open or hidden interethnic tensions.

Since schools are centers of national cultures and education all problems mentioned above have found their reflection in these centers' functioning and performance (treatment of various facts of the past in history text books, instruction in mother tongues and in Russian, location of schools of some ethnic groups in territories of other ethnic groups, apparition of refugee children and migrants' children in various regions).

Ethnic tribal regimes that enjoy the complete control of political and economic power leverages have emerged virtually in all Northern Caucasus republics. Due to prevalence of resource shortage this dominance of a single ethnic group relegates other ethnic groups to the second class position with all concomitant consequences. At the same time the elites in power undertake attempts to provide ideological substantiation of exclusive rights of ethnic groups they represent. Sometimes these attempts involve a rather aggressive assertion of historical and exclusive rights of indigenous nations. As such claims are advanced 'the historical blame' for conquest and oppression of indigenous nations is ascribed to Russia. Such interpretation of the past is increasingly reflected in textbooks for schools and higher educational institutions.

Appearance of ethnic groups members of which previously did not reside en masse in the territory of the region is one of migration consequences. The Armenians and the Karachai people have appeared in the Caucasian Mineral Waters district while representatives of Dagestan nations (primarily the Avar and the Dargin people) and the Chechens have appeared in the Republic of Kalmykia and in the eastern parts of Stavropol region as well as in Astrakhan and Rostov regions. The Meskhetian Turks have come to many subjects of the Southern Federal district. Armenians are well integrated into population of Northern Caucasus. The majority of Meskhetian Turks who were

deported from the Caucasus under Stalin started to return to the Caucasus since the late 1990s. Most often they live in compact communities of the closed type in the countryside and work in agriculture. They speak the local languages poorly and their problem is their poor integration on the local society. That, to the full extent, can be said of the newcomers' children who graduate from the secondary school (11 classes) seldom. Situation with the girls is even more unfavorable: according to teachers, majority of them, quits education at the age of puberty and further on stay at home providing help in household works until their early marriages.

Migration processes brought about changes of the ethnic and confessional balance which has formed. In result of these changes relations of the local indigenous population with migrant communities often are poised at the verge of conflict and sometimes develop into open local conflicts.

Although the Northern Caucasus is a diverse region, its constituent republics share a common set of characteristics. Based on the socioeconomic and educational indicators, the Northern Caucasus republics could be grouped into three clusters. Adygeya enjoys the most favorable socioeconomic situation, with its indices of socio-economic and educational development approximating the average for the Russian Federation.<sup>4</sup> The region is located inside the Krasnodar krai, which has dynamic economic development and will be the center of the winter Olympic Games in 2014. The next group consists of North Ossetia–Alania (without the Prigorodnii region), Karachaevo–Cherkessia, and Kabardino–Balkaria, where socioeconomic indices are two times worse than the average for Russia. However, these republics witnessed improvement trends over the last five years. The group with the lowest socioeconomic performance in Russia consists of Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Dagestan, and the Prigorodnii region of the North Ossetia–Alania.

The level of urbanization is one of the key indicators of modernization because human, social, and economic capital is generally concentrated in cities. The proportion of urban population varies by republic, with North Ossetia-Alania and Adygeya having the largest proportion of urban population (64.7% and 52.5% respectively) and Chechnya the lowest (34.3%), in the Russian Federation comprises on average 72.9%(see Table 1).

With the exception of Dagestan in other republics of NCR, the non – capital urban settlements are small and largely undeveloped as education centers and with qualified teachers and higher education lecturers. Thus, the number of higher education institutions in Kabardino-Balakaria is limited to four, followed by three in Ingushetiya and Chechnya, two in Karachai-Cherkessiya, and only one in Adygea (see Table 5). Undoubtedly, this inhibits the dissemination of knowledge and infrastructure.

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<sup>4</sup> Rosstat, *Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The main socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume]*. (Moskva: Rosstat, 2006).

## 2. Socioeconomic development and Demographic changes and trends<sup>5</sup>

The total population of seven North Caucasian republics comprises 6.6 million people (see Table 1).<sup>6</sup> The last Census (2002) indicated a population growth in Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Dagestan and Karachaevo–Cherkessia, despite the mass outflow of population during the Chechnya wars.<sup>7</sup> Adigea, North Ossetia and Kabardino –Balkaria and Chechnya lose population.

Prior to the 1990s, population increases due to birth were typical across the Northern Caucasus republics, resulting in a high proportion of children and youth in these republics. The proportion of children and youth (newborns to 17 year olds) in the total population fluctuates between a high of 41.4% in Ingushetiya, 39.3% in Chechnya, and 35.4% in Dagestan, to a low of 17.7% in Adygheya, 24.8% Karachai-Cherkessiya and Ossetia-Alania, and 27.6% in Kabardino-Balkaria.<sup>8</sup>

Table 1. General demographic and labor characteristics in the Northern Caucasus Republics, 2006.

	Population, thousands	Population in capital cities, thousands	Percentage of urban population	Percentage of population in capital cities	Calculated unemployment rate (ILO), Percentage	Registered unemployment rate, Percentage	Index of net migration (in 10 000's)
<b>Russia</b>	<b>142753,5</b>	<b>10425,1</b>	<b>72,9</b>	<b>7,3</b>	<b>7,6</b>	<b>2,5</b>	<b>9</b>
		<b>Moscow</b>					
<b>South Federal Okrug (SFO)</b>	<b>22790,3</b>	<b>1054,8</b>	<b>57,0</b>	<b>4,6</b>	<b>14,2</b>	<b>5,8</b>	<b>3</b>
		<b>Rostov-on-Don</b>					
Adygheya	442,7	156,8	52,6	35,4	12,9	4,9	11
		Maikop					
Dagestan	2641,0	466,3	42,7	17,7	22,3	4,6	-23
		Makhachkala					
Ingushetiya	487,0	0,3	42,7	0,1	64,9	23,9	9
		Magas*					

<sup>5</sup> There are many criticisms of the accuracy of the Russian statistical information published in the official sources. Its data often contradicts information from independent surveys and studies, such as data on the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP). Nevertheless, census data can be compared with the statistical data gathered in the republics to understand socioeconomic differences that exist in these republics. Such comparisons can be verified with materials from other sources, especially references to information gathered by international organizations.

<sup>6</sup> Generally, all statistical information on socioeconomic indices on Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Osetia-Alania and Dagestan should be checked for accuracy, because statistical data collection mechanisms in many regions were destroyed or seriously damaged during military operations.

<sup>7</sup> Protopopov. A., Absolutely non-Olympic principle, *Expert*, 26 (2007): 9-15.

<sup>8</sup> Rosstat, *Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik*.

Kabardino-Balkaria	894,0	271,4 Nalchik	44,2	30,4	23,4	9,1	-32
Karachai-Cherkessiy	431,5	116,9 Cherkessk	44,1	27,1	13,6	3,4	-71
North Ossetia-Alania	702,3	314,1 Vladikavkaz	64,7	44,7	8,8	4,6	-18
Chechnya	1162,8	218,2 Grozni	34,3	18,8	74,2	74,2	-12

\* Nazran city: 130.2 thousand people (was a second city at Chechnya - Ingushetiya republic before they got independent and this city played role of Ingushetiya capital).

Source: Rosstat, *Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The primary socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume]*. (Moskva: Rosstat., 2006).

A high level of officially registered unemployment highlights the unfavorable socioeconomic situation in the North Caucasus republics. (see Table 1). It is comparable to the Russian average only in Adygheya (12.9%) and North Ossetia-Alania (8.8%), but substantially exceeds it in Ingushetiya (64.9%), Kabardino-Balkaria (23.4%), and Dagestan (22.3%). Similarly, the prospects of finding employment in the Northern Caucasus republics are much lower than in the Russian Federation.

Combined of demographic pressure with an unfavorable socioeconomic situation, such a large number of dependent people contribute to the growth of poverty in the Northern Caucasus republics and put more children at risk of limited education opportunities.

### 3. Multiethnicity and its challenges to education opportunities

The Northern Caucasus republics are the most multiethnic region of Russia, providing home to more than 70 ethnic groups. In the history of their coexistence, some of these groups at different times experienced ethnic tensions. The historical memory often (for example, as in case of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict) is one of the inter-ethnic tension. Many conflicts originated in the 19th century and gained greater intensity after the deportations carried out by Stalin when thousands of people from the Northern Caucasus were forcedly resettled to Siberia and Central Asia. Some of these conflicts persist to the present day and cause bloody events like the widely known conflicts in the Prigorodny district of North Ossetia in the 1990s, the Beslan tragedy in the Ossetian school in 2004, and cases of Russian teachers and their families being killed in Ingushetiya in the summer of 2007. Such eruptions of violence undermine peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups and create problems for the education process.

Table 2 highlights several important trends occurring within the indigenous ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus republics. First, the indigenous population continues to grow despite the overall population decrease in some republics, which is likely to be partially caused by the out-migration of the Russian-speaking population from the Northern

Caucasus republics. Second, there is an increase of ethnic homogeneity and ethnic concentration in most of the Northern Caucasus republics (with the exception of Chechnya) and “squeezing” out of some ethnic minority groups in several republics of the Northern Caucasus republics (see Table 2).<sup>9</sup> The rapid increase of ethnic homogeneity across the region raises some concerns. On the one hand, this may alleviate inter-ethnic tensions as some minority ethnic groups may feel pressured to leave by titular ethnic groups. On the other hand, ethnic concentration of indigenous populations may have adverse effects on the acquisition of Russian language skills among titular ethnicities, hindering their opportunities to pursue higher education studies anywhere in the Russian Federation.

One of the focus group in North Ossetia-Alania was held in a very special village and reflected all the problems of the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. It is purely a Ingush village located in the Prigorodnyi district in North Ossetia-Alania and notorious for bloody fights and Ingush migration from there to Ingushetiya. But not all Ingush families left. For those families who have not migrated children have to be delivered to school by a special transportation vehicle through the Ossetian part of the village. If a child misses the school bus he/she cannot get to school on his/her own because such trips are unsecured. If this is the case child will then miss the lesson at school. All education process is very complicated because of this situation It is impossible to organize extra lessons for these children for the same reason: children are brought to school for a limited time.

#### 4. Conflicts and its impact on education development

The collapse of the Soviet Union has heightened ethnic tensions and resulted in ethnic conflicts across the Northern Caucasus region. Perhaps the most difficult situation is in Chechnya. The resurgence of Chechen nationalism in the 1990s was accompanied by a resurgence of Islam. Political and military violence began to dominate all Chechen affairs. Annually, tens and even hundreds of people were killed by armored rebels. First and second Chechen wars from 1994-1996, and again in 1999 -2000, seriously damaged the economic infrastructure and disrupted both agricultural and industrial activity.

Table 2. Changes in the population of selected ethnic groups in the North Caucasian republics.

NCR and primary native ethnic groups	Index of ethnic homogeneity, Percentage/				Increase of ethnic group, Percentage		Level of urbanization of ethnic group, Percentage	
	Index of ethnic concentration, Percentage				1959-1989	1989-2002	1959	2002
	1926	1959	1989	2002				
<b><i>Adygheya</i></b>								

<sup>9</sup> Chechens present the only exception, because they were forced to migrate during the wars in previous decade.

Adyges	45	23/84	22/78	24,2/84	56	4,9	9	46,7
<b>Dagestan</b>								
Avars	18/99	23/96	28/91	29,4/93	118	49,6	9,4	36,6
Dargins	14/100	14/97	16/79	16,5/83	132	44,5	13	33,8
Kумыks	11/93	11/91	13/84	14,2/80	109	52,3	33,4	47,1
Lezgins	11/97	10/95	11/79	13,1/89	125	60,3	11,2	46,8
Laks	5/99	5/92	5/86	5,4/89	82	48,1	25,7	70,1
<b>Ingushetiya</b>								
Ingush*	18/97	7/87	13/76	77,3/86	285	92,1	8,7	45,2
<b>Kabardino-Balkaria</b>								
Kabardins	60/88	45/95	48/94	55,3/96	92	34,7	12	46,4
Balkars	16/100	8/97	9/90	11,6/97	122	38,5	13,8	47,6
<b>Karachai - Cherkessia</b>								
Karachais	53/95	24/96	31/86	38,5/88	113	28	7	38,2
Cherkess	3/78	9/83	10/79	11,3/82	74	19,6	6	37,3
<b>North Ossetia</b>								
Osetiyans	84/82	48/87	53/83	62,7/87	62	28,1	31,8	64,6
<b>Chechnya</b>								
Chechens*	76/91	34/93	58/82	93,5/76	244	51,3	9,1	36,9

Notes: \*Until 2002, data was calculated for the combined territory of the Chechen-Ingushetiya republic.

Source: Trifonova, Z., *Dinamika titylnih narodov Rossii*. [The dynamics of titular nationalities of Russia]. *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta [News of the Moscow University]*, 2 (2008): pp.45-57.

The situation in Dagestan also complicated especially since the late 1990s, when Dagestan has experienced a steady growth of support for Islamist groups. Aided by local militant Islamists, Chechen militants invaded Dagestan in August-September 1999; an explosion in Buinaksk, outside facilities used to accommodate federal troops, killed about 60 people, bombing on May 9, 2002 in Kaspisk, when 45 people were killed. Relations with Chechnya were further strained after 11 villagers were abducted during a “cleansing” operation in Borozdinovskaya. The situation has remained unstable until now, with frequent military outbreaks from both sides. Every month the media reports new cases of terrorist acts, killings, or hatred cases.

The other republic is North Ossetia-Alania, where the tragedy of Beslan has become known worldwide. On the first day of school (September 1, 2004), approximately 30 militants seized control of a local school, taking at least 1,100 pupils, parents, and teachers hostage. Following a series of explosions on September 3, federal special forces stormed the school. Official figures claimed that some 334 hostages were killed, including about 200 children, although some independent estimates placed the number of fatalities at closer to 600.

The situation in Kabardino –Balkaria also indicated the importance of possibilities for youth development. The absence of access to education and labour market push youth to islam radical groups. The unrest of youth in Nalchik – capital of Kabardino –Balkaria in 2005 the example of protest of young people against the gloomy life.

Some of the factors underlying ethnic conflicts in the region include deteriorating economic conditions, ineffective local governance, consolidation of clans, human rights violations, unabated corruption, resurgence of radical Islam, the growth of migration, and many others (see Table 3). Undoubtedly, these factors underline some of the ethnic tensions in the region and they are likely to remain unresolved in the near future. Using an evaluation scale of conflict possibilities in the Northern Caucasus, experts from the Russian Academy of Science<sup>10</sup> suggest that Dagestan, Ingushetiya, and Chechnya continue to be the area of “hot conflicts,” scoring “4” on a five score scale, with “5” representing the “hot” conflicts and “0” representing latent hidden tensions. Of all Northern Caucasus republics, only Adygheya is rated the lowest, while the situation in North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachai-Cherkessiya republics scored “3” with a trend of gradually decreasing number of ethnic conflicts.

To summarize, continued ethnic tensions and conflicts have become features of every day life in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, and occasionally in other republics, negatively affecting all society and especially children. For example, surveys carried out in 2002 and 2004 by specialists of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Moscow Scientific Research Institute of Psychology have demonstrated that the incidence of psychotic disorders and disturbances among the Chechen population<sup>11</sup> Disturbance of social functioning prevails amongst teenagers because 28% of them (i.e. among adolescents examined in 2004) had psychologically traumatic experiences related to threats on their lives, whereas in 2002, the corresponding figure was 65%. Similarly, studies performed by UNICEF demonstrated that a great number of children and their parents need psychological rehabilitation.<sup>12</sup>

Table 3. The primary factors affecting political stability in the Northern Caucasus republics (a summary of different sources).

<b>Factors explaining potential conflicts (by experts of the Southern</b>	<b>Factors explaining ethno-political instability (by Avksentiev, 2004)<sup>14</sup></b>	<b>Issues affecting future stability and chances for sustainable development</b>
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<sup>10</sup> Dmitriev., A.V., False impression of danger. *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (September 8, 2006); Avksentiev, G., Gritsenko, A., Dmitriev, “Studies of regional conflicts: Experts’ opinion,” ed. Gorshkov (Moscow: ‘Alfa-M,’ 2007): 114.

<sup>11</sup> K.A. Idrisov, V. N.Krasnov, *Psychiatric health of Chechen Republic Population Under Enduring State of Emergency. Disturbances.* (Moscow: WHO, Scientific Research Institute of psychiatry, the RF Ministry of public health. Grozny, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> [www.unicef.org/infobycountry](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry)

<sup>13</sup> Avksentiev, V. Gritsenko, G. Dmitriev, A.V, Studies of regional conflicts: Experts’ opinion, in ed. M. Gorshkov. (Moscow: Alfa-M, 2007).

Federal Okrug), 2007 <sup>13</sup>		(by Neil J. Melvin, 2007) <sup>15</sup>
• Deteriorating economic situation in previous years, with no prospects of improvement	• Nation building processes based on ethnicity principles	• Unresolved national territorial issues
• Local government authorities ignore people's needs	• Identity crisis based on the disappearance of the Soviet identity	• Resurgence of Islam and Islamism
• Human rights violations	• Geopolitical transformation (changes in influential actors)	• Governance
• Unabated growth of corruption	• Economic factors	• Deteriorating socio-economic conditions
• Frequent use of violence as a tool for conflict resolution	• Migration	

## 6. Examining the Issues of Access to Quality of Education

During the Soviet period, the Northern Caucasus republics had some of the lowest education indicators compared to other Soviet republics. In 1989 according to the census information, for example, the average number of people with higher education was around 68 per thousand among the Avars, 61 among the Dargins, 60 among the Ingush, and 45 among Chechens, compared to an average of 113 per thousand in the Russian Federation.<sup>16</sup> After more than 15 years of civil unrest, militant activities, and economic decline, some scholars compare the education level of the Northern Caucasus republics to that of 1957.<sup>17</sup> In 2005, the Northern Caucasus republics had some of the lowest per capita spending in education in the Russian Federation. For example, Chechnya's per capita funding on education measured only one fourth of Russia's average, and in Ingushetiya and North Ossetia it barely reached one half of Russia's average in 2005 (see Table 4). A lack of financial resources, further aggravated by the consequences of the

<sup>14</sup> Avksentiev V., *Factori etnopoliticheskoi nestabilnosti v Severokavkazskom regione Etnicheskie problemi sovremennosti [Factors of ethno-political instability in the Northern Caucasus region: Ethnic problems of modernity]*. (Stavropol, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Melvin, N. J., *Building Stabilities in the Northern Caucasus: Way Forward for Russia and the European Union* [Stockholm International Research Peace Institute policy paper]. (Stockholm: SIRPI, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Volkov Y.A. Sybetto A.I. Volkov A.Y., *Obrazovanie i intellektualnii potentsial Russii: Statistika sotsiologicheskii monitoring besproizvodstva. [Education and intellectual potential of Russia: Sociological monitoring]* (Moscow-St. Petersburg, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Ovkhadov, M., "Itogi natsionalnoi politiki sovetskogo perioda I problemi sovremennoi Chechni," in *Chechnia: Ot Konflikta k Stabilnosti (Problemi rekonstryktsii). [Chechnya: From conflict to stability (Problems of reconstruction)]*, eds. D. Gakaev & A. Yandarov (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAS, 2001).

prolonged political instability, military conflicts, and ethnic tensions, has created multiple adverse effects on education in the Northern Caucasus republics.

There are several issues which according to our and teachers opinion influence the access to quality of education and as consequence the future of children to choose militancy or peaceful life.

(1) historical memory of ethnic groups; (2) migration of ethnic Russian population (3) multiethnicity of region and education language issue, (4) widespread corruption in education, (5) female pupils disadvantage to finish education (6) rise of influence of Islam religious education (8) refugee and internally displaced people inflow; (9) long – term conflict transformation period

Analysis of data from focus groups and structured interviews with education experts has revealed that the Northern Caucasus republics share many commonalities in terms of education access and quality. However, the nature and intensity of some of the problems differs by specific republic

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**Table 4.** The Primary Population and Education Characteristics of the Northern Caucasus Republics, 2005.

	<b>Total population (thousands)</b>	<b>Number of population under the working age</b>	<b>Percentage of population under the working age</b>	<b>Percentage of population 0–17 years old</b>	<b>Number of students (thousands)</b>	<b>Number of schools</b>
<b>Northern Caucasus Republics (total)</b>	<b>6 645.1</b>	<b>1 857.4</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>1022.9</b>	<b>3191</b>
Adygea	447.1	41.6	17.7	21.6	48.0	175
Dagestan	2 576.5	792.3	30.7	35.4	432.5	1687
Ingushetiya	467.3	171.3	36.7	41.1	64.9	115
Kabardino-Balkaria	901.5	214.1	23.7	27.6	115.6	343
Karachay-Cherkessia	439.5	100.0	22.7	26.5	55.7	192
North Ossetia-Alania	710.3	151.7	21.3	24.8	91.4	219
Chechnya	1 103.7	386.4	35.0	39.3	214.8	460

Source: Rosstat, *Osnovnie sotsialno-ekonomicheskie pokazateli: Statisticheskii sbornik. [The primary socioeconomic indicators: Statistical volume]*. (Moskva: Rosstat, 2006).

## **7. Religion education – pass to conflict or to stability?**

### **Religious Education: Path to Conflict or Stability?**

The problem of religious extremism, terrorism and separatism is the most acute current problem of the Caucasus. Social control and ideology of the Soviet time stopped to exist in the society and are quickly displaced with religious instruction of various doctrines. In the Soviet period the school was the basic unit within which the Soviet person was forged: at the second form children were admitted to the Octobrist organization of ‘Lenin’s grandchildren’, and at the third or fourth form children were admitted to the Pioneer organization (of Scout type). Thus children younger than 14 years old were involved in the ideological life of the country which was closely connected with the educational process. Children had a duty: they had to learn well in accordance with

Lenin's testament. Those who did not do that violated this testament and were subject to various measures of pressure: public censure and dispraise, summoning of parents to school and imposition of patronage of better pupils over those who lagged behind. Under the total state ideological control a child was not left unattended.

Erosion and ultimate destruction of the Socialist control and dissolution of such children organizations brought about a prompt revival of national and religious values. Resurgence of Islam is accompanied with establishment of a great number of religious schools that involve in their activities not just adult persons but children as well. This trend is particularly evident in the countryside. Teachers in Dagestan and Chechnya tell: 'Every day, from 5 AM to 7 PM all males including boys and adolescents go to the mosque. There are special religious schools where mullahs instruct children. It is good. Earlier, in the Soviet times children were instructed in sections and after that, what did they do? Breakdown of the Soviet educational system brought about elimination of sport establishments and places of instruction for children in many quarters. In the 1990s growth of law violations was observed everywhere. And now mullahs control the situation'<sup>18</sup>.

Internal religious confrontation (in the first place in the Muslim community between adherents of traditional school and Islamist radicals) is one of the principal factors of the extremist manifestations. This confrontation has acquired particularly acute forms in republics of Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Circassia. In the Republic of Dagestan split of the Muslim ummah along the ethnic lines is one of the determinants of interethnic tensions.

Wahhabism as a form of religiously inspired political extremism has a strong aspect: it has a great ideological potential capable to mobilize certain social groups (urban dwellers, unemployed young people, some segments of intelligentsia, student youth) for implementation of an alternative model of social organization: mini-communities that are closed from the larger society and embody the ideas of justice, equality and brotherhood.

The radical wing of Wahhabi Muslims entices boys not just in the religious instruction but forms terrorist gangs of them. A woman teacher said quite approvingly: 'My son started to go to the mosque'. But then she added: "I noted that he was drifting away of me and I started to inquire him. He told that he was talked into going to the woods and preparing for struggle against infidels. I was frightened very much and forbade him to go there alone, without my husband. So gradually I have drawn him out of this group"<sup>19</sup>. Against the background of the Northern Caucasian republics' population deep social stratification Wahhabi ideas get a considerable support of various segments of the Russia Muslims.

Though expansion of Islam prevails it is not the only religion which develops its influence in the Caucasus. A school principal from the North Ossetia or, more precisely, from a suburb of the republican capital Vladikavkaz told that in the republic where

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with a teacher from Dagestan, April, 2008

<sup>19</sup> Interview with a Chechen woman, March, 2009.

Christianity predominates Jehovah's Witnesses developed a vigorous campaign. The Jehovah's Witnesses draw in the whole families. According to their doctrine, children must not take part in any sport activities, children festivals or in interest circles. The principal noted: 'I have talked to parents and to their spiritual leaders. They are impregnable. Such children are going to be isolated in any children collective'.

## **8.. Languages issues**

One of the biggest problems for children in rural and mountainous areas is the issue of language instruction. Officially, Russian is the main language of instruction in all Northern Caucasus republics, allocating 3-4 academic hours per week to native languages in the official school curriculum. The problem is that many Russian language teachers left the region as a result of the military conflict outbreaks, political instability, and ethnic hatred incidents against Russian teachers.<sup>20</sup> The outflow of many ethnic Russian teachers to Russian ethnic regions has left NCR schools without qualified education professionals, and this situation is particularly aggravated in rural areas. Teachers of various ethnic groups still work in urban settlements, while teachers in the rural areas represent almost exclusively the indigenous ethnic groups of their specific geographic area. Most of these teachers are not native Russian language speakers who face difficulties teaching school subjects in the Russian language. Ironically, these teachers have to teach students who often have no or limited Russian language skills. In these complex circumstances, the rural/urban divide in the quality of education becomes especially apparent.

Furthermore, a new generation of youth in the Northern Caucasus is coming of age without a systematic knowledge of their mother tongue and native literature. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, pre-service education of teachers of native/mother languages has been substantially reduced. In Chechnya, for example, at the department of philology in state university the number of students who studied native language and literature was reduced from 75 students per year in the late 1980s to 15 students per year in 1998.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, there has been a decrease of the number of publications in national languages, further hindering opportunities for education in native/mother tongue for students in the Northern Caucasus republics. As a result, the post-Soviet generation of children and youth in many regions of the Northern Caucasus is growing up without adequate knowledge of both their native/mother tongue and literature and the Russian language.

## **Migration of Russian-speaking Population as a Factor of Destabilization**

Outflow of the Russian-speaking population has driven the economy of the region back for many years and brought about deterioration of labor resources quality. That restricts

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<sup>20</sup> During the Soviet period, many school teachers (especially teachers of Russian language and literature) were usually members of Slavic groups (including Russians, Ukrainians) as well as Armenians.

<sup>21</sup>Mizerikov, V., «Sovremennoe sostoianie obrazovania Chechenskoi respubliky » in *Chechnia: Ot Konflikta k Stabilnosti (Problemi rekonstryktsii)*. [*Chechnya: From conflict to stability (Problems of reconsruction)*], eds. D. Gakaev & A. Yandarov (Institute of Ethnology and Antropology RAS, 2001).

chances to modernize economies of the national republics and contributes to preservation of their social and economic retardation in comparison with other regions of the country. The level of education and health service declined drastically due to the same reason.

The Russian people were the principal vehicles of the Russian cultural influence in the region. Massive outflow of Russians who once formed the core of engineer and technical elite from republics of Northern Caucasus is a factor of not just social tension but of economic retardation.<sup>22</sup>

According to experts of the Russian academy of sciences, in the period between two censuses (that is to say, between 1989 and 2002) share of Russians in the total population of the Northern Caucasus reduced from 26% to 15% and in some republics it dropped to 1-4%. (However decrease of the Russian-speaking population in the Northern Caucasus occurs not only due to their resettlement to other regions but also due to low birth rates against high increment of indigenous nations numbers). That reduces the level of health service and education in the republics.<sup>23</sup>

Hostilities that raged in the republics in the 1990s, accidents when Russian teachers' families were massacred (such accidents repeatedly happened in Ingushetia and brought about imposition of anti-terrorist operation regime in the republic in 2007), and hostilities that involved so called 'mopping-up' operations in the countryside have contributed a lot to outflow of Russians from the Northern Caucasus.

Leaders of mono-ethnic constituent parts of the Russian Federation understand the necessity of Russian-speaking population return to the Northern Caucasus. The system of education and public health in greater part of regions reposed on the Russian-speaking specialists. The Republic of Ingushetia started making the first steps in the right direction and accepted 'Recovery of the Russian-speaking population which previously resided in the republic and its resettlement' program for 2004-2010.

Hava Evloeva, Vice Prime-Minister of the Republic of Ingushetia says; 'Russian specialists are much demanded, we easily find employment for them at schools, in hospitals, in oil refining plants. We offer to young people a chance to get a higher education in the Ingush State University on the privileged basis'.

A special commission for the Russian-speaking population problems is established in Dagestan. Also the state body, the Republic of Dagestan coordination council for the Northern region is established.

The most difficult situation is observed in Chechnya. The republic has virtually no manufacturing of its own, the level of unemployment is the highest in the Federal district.

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<sup>22</sup> Katerina Pogontseva. Migration of the Russia intelligentsia as a disruption of balance of forces. Teachers employed due to their close relations with authorities are not the specialists. Narodnii byksir (in Russian). See: 'Rossiiskaya Gazeta'; Economy of the Southern District. See: <http://www.rg.ru/2008/06/17/reg-kavkaz/migraciya.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Yuri Soshin. Russian Language at North Caucasus, June 28, 2007. See: <http://www.prvaya.ru/look/12727>

However there are about three thousand vacancies that, according to representatives of the republican administration, cannot be filled with the specialists locally available. For instance, public health institutions of the Chechen Republic need 2055 of highly skilled medical persons, educational institutions need 450 tutors and lecturers.

### **Russians and Russian language as the factor of stability in the North Caucasus region.**

Issue of the fundamental culture forming function of the Russian language is permanently discussed in media, in academic research and in the governmental debates as one of the corner stones of the Caucasus and Russia unity.<sup>24</sup>

The Russian language began to spread all over the Caucasus from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. From the early 18<sup>th</sup> century it became a leverage of spiritual and economic influence in the region and contributed to the inter-ethnic consolidation, particularly so in Dagestan. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a well defined and developed stratum of the mountaineer national intelligentsia which was raised due to the opportunity to get education in the Russian language. Already in that period many Caucasian nations under the unquestionable impact of the Russian culture began to create their own full-fledged written languages and literature. In greater part of cases creation of national written languages was made possible only on the basis of Cyrillic alphabet and Russian grammar. Attempts to revive Arabic written language or impose of Latin alphabet proved to be unsuccessful<sup>25</sup>. For instance, the attempt to introduce Latin alphabet in the independent Ichkerya (Chechnya) under Johar Dudaev in the early 1990s also failed.

Debates on ethnic languages' own path of development and on introduction and use of Arabic language (which had only applied, religious significance) but there was virtually no written language tradition and the general literacy of population was negligible.

In spite of all negative aspects of the Soviet history it should be noted that in the Soviet period an enormous cultural and educational work was done at the Northern Caucasus. The system of secondary of higher education in national republics in the Soviet period performed in a rather effective way, libraries with Russian and national languages stocks were created etc.

Upon the disintegration of the USSR attempts to realize the separatist scenario were repeated again and again with the use of anti-Russian myths and anti-Russian interpretation of national histories. Implicit and explicit propaganda of Russophobia was used intensely too. All these phenomena have massive and multilayered character. In recent years the system of education built in the Soviet times was practically destroyed. That has brought about a massive fall of population's cultural level.

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<sup>24</sup> Yuri Soshin. Russian Language at North Caucasus. June 28, 2007. See: <http://pravaya.ru/look/12727/>

<sup>25</sup> Written language based on the Arabic alphabet was inherent only for the Kumyk language.

Crisis of the secondary and higher education and depletion of trained teachers' cadre is getting to be increasingly acute. The system of the secondary education reposes on teachers who got training in the Soviet period. The median age of 125 teachers who were polled was older than 45 years. This problem is particularly acute for countryside and mountain regions where educational system is acquiring an increasingly symbolic character. The deterioration is especially visible in instruction in Russian language and literature. However if in urban schools instruction in Russian is still performed, even if in the improper, impaired way in rural schools the very teacher of the Russian language is unable to speak or read in Russian.

Majority of children (over 50%) come to school unprepared in pre-school institutions due to lack of such institutions in the countryside or shortage of places in them. This problem is particularly acute in Chechen Republic, Republic of Ingushetia, and partially in Northern Ossetia in places of refugees' staying. Teachers point out two alternate problems: the first problem is the need to translate content of textbooks to children into their mother tongues during lessons, the second problem can be exemplified by the situation observed, for instance, in North Ossetian schools where refugees' children are learning: teachers of Russian language or of Ossetian language often do not know the South Ossetian dialect or Georgian language on which Ossetians-natives of deep Georgian regions are speaking. Children and their teachers speak different languages and do not understand each other.

Nevertheless a greater attention is paid to the national language and literature at schools. These disciplines are taught no less than 10 hours a week. True, as pupils pass to the secondary school number of hours is cut down to 7. Thus refugees' children are often to learn two languages (Russian and national) and in result cannot speak properly in any of these languages.

### **Gender Problems in School Education.**

Gender peculiarities that are typical for the Muslim tradition appeared in republics of Northern Caucasus in result of development and expansion of Islam.

Gender problems that existed before the revolution of 1917 seemed to be solved in the Soviet times through involvement of women in education and work. This method was used in Central Asia too and proved to be successful because educated and employed women acquired a higher standing in society. Wars, revival of Islam and national traditions brought about restitution of Muslim customs (early marriages and relegation of women to household work) in regions that suffered most from conflicts and hostilities.

These trends are particularly typical for Chechnya where a great number of young men were killed in result of hostilities and the gap between women and men is extremely high (1 to 8).<sup>26</sup> This situation makes mothers to look after their daughters' marriage at earlier

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<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately only estimative data on ratio of men older than 18 years and younger than 30 years old to women of respective ages are available. According these data, the ratio is 1 to 8. However these data are

age. Interviews with teachers of secondary schools<sup>27</sup> reveal that ‘by the eleventh form (the last year of secondary education) only 1-2 girls are left in a class. The rest girls are wed as early as at 13 years or some later age, especially in mountain villages. Sometimes girls are willing to marry at early age for they are afraid to remain unmarried, sometimes they are married against their own will’.<sup>28</sup>

Advancement of polygamy goes quickly due to the same reasons. Ratio of males to females is unfavorable for women and that forces women to agree to the Muslim marriage though polygamy is officially forbidden in the RF.

Such marriages happen against women’s will too. Sometimes a bride does not know her groom. Sometimes a teacher of a school where a bride learns can be her groom. Recently abduction of brides flourishes on the wave of general growth of violence and permissiveness, particularly in Chechnya and Ingushetia. Partially that is connected with revival of national customs that existed prior to the revolution of 1917, partially it is due to impossibility to arrange a marriage properly due to expensiveness of the traditional rite.

A case when a girl student was abducted by a school teacher was reported to the author. Since it was impossible to do that officially and the perpetrator could be imprisoned for that they married in accordance with the religious norms and until she graduated from the school the teacher took his young wife from her parents’ house on Fridays and brought her back on Monday mornings. The girl was pregnant by the time of graduation from the school. Naturally, nobody complained to the police because such affairs are settled by clans and such complaints are morally forbidden.

To avoid a marriage after abduction is virtually impossible. Elders come to a home of a bride’s parents and parents cannot reject the offer. Sometimes issue of marriage is simplified. Marriage brokers simply come to a girl’s parents, give them 2 or 4 thousand dollars (the amount is determined depending on a bride’s family status) and take a girl away. It should be noted that the society already accepts such behavior. Women several times repeated the argument: ‘If he abducted a girl he must really love her’. When asked about a girl’s feelings these women gave a shrug of their shoulders and said that in their circumstances it was better if HE loved and a girl might do without such feelings.

Undoubtedly there are tragedies hidden from eyes. During training of women-teachers an under-age daughter of one of trainees was abducted and the trainee had to depart prematurely. Reaction of the whole group was interesting. The mother of abducted girl wept and said that her daughter did not want to marry. Some trainees consoled her, some congratulated with son-in-law while some thought that it was the girl who arranged everything. The story of the mother is remarkable also. She had an Ossetian mother and Chechen father. His father died and her mother returned to North Ossetia. The woman’s

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unreliable. The same should be said of the 2002 census data on Chechnya. These data have been repeatedly criticized in media as unreliable ones.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews the author took in Kislovodsk at focus group sessions, March 23-27, 2009.

<sup>28</sup>

relatives were Christians<sup>29</sup>. At the age of 16 the girl was abducted by her future husband's relatives, brought to Chechnya and was forced to marry against her will. Since she was a Christian she had to convert to Islam in accordance with Muslim traditions. She said: 'If not my mother-in-law who was a very good woman and became my second mother I do not know how I could survive the situation. I was very religious and the first two years were a terrible experience for me...' When I asked 'Why she couldn't to retain her Christian faith?' all women stared explain in chorus that after the death a wife has to repose alongside her husband in the Muslim cemetery. In addition, a man who converted an infidel deserves a greater love of Allah.

The traditional interruption of school attendance after achievement of sexual maturity was identified in the course of focus group session with psychologists from North Ossetia who worked in community of Meskhetian Turks. These Turks came from Tajikistan in the late 1980s. They live in very insular groups and marry girls from their own communities. According the psychologists, girls do not attend school from the sixth form and soon marry. As it was already noted, such model of behavior is more typical for mountain regions and poor families with many children. These families are happy to get rid of a mouth. It is interesting that many such families try to fob their daughters off on well-to-do families of compatriots residing outside the native republic (for example, in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg) and particularly on those who have Russian wives. The clan's pressure is employed. It is said that a mountaineer has to take a wife from his own nation as well.

Notion of honor preservation does not allow letting girls to attend lessons of physical culture from the fourth or fifth form onwards, that is to say, from the puberty age. A teacher of physical culture complained that due to lack of physical education girls have various health problems. Instructors of physical culture schools complained that girls attend only chess and checks groups and do that only if a school is located in the place of girls' residence. Thus reversion of the Northern Caucasus republics to tribalism and Shari'ah with their peculiar treatment of women has come at amazingly quick pace. Sure, these traditions and customs do not contribute to development of tolerance and beget hidden conflicts suppressed by fear to violate traditions.

Issue of hijabs on student heads in Chechnya is not discussed because the Chechen president approved the custom. All women, even unmarried girls have to wear hijabs. In many cases women do not like this novelty. In conversations with teachers admitted that refusal to wear hijab is in the first place not safe because girls who do not wear hijabs can provoke acts of violence, e.g. stones can be pitched at them or they can be splashed with an acid. Kadyrov prohibited appearance of women without hijabs at official institution and announced that chiefs of such institutions would be fined.

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<sup>29</sup> Ossetians are the only mountaineer nation of Northern Caucasus which is Christian though they retain a lot of pagan traditions.

## 12. Widespread corruption in education

The higher education system has become corrupted and formal. Acquisition of knowledge is replaced with acquisition of diplomas that are obtained by virtue of financial resources or by help of clan pressures. A considerable part of young people (and virtually all young Russians) leave the region for getting real (and inexpensive) education and training and do not return back.

The difficulties of the transition period have affected teachers as a professional group. While all teachers were required to participate in professional development activities once every five years during the Soviet period, such requirements can no longer be met due to financial restrictions. As one of the interviewed teachers explained:

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*There are two types of people who decide to work in schools as teachers. They are either dedicated fanatics whose numbers are dwindling each year... or those who cannot find any other job. It is necessary to improve the social status of a teacher, to make this job prestigious, and to change the attitude of society towards school education.*

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Focus groups and interviews with school teachers revealed that corruption is perceived to be among the most serious problems in the education systems of the Northern Caucasus republics. Teachers as a professional group insist that a combination of poverty, unemployment, and commercialization of education have created fertile space for corrupt practices, especially as students prepare for entrance to higher education. The existing gap between higher education entrance requirements and the school curriculum prohibits the majority of students from entering higher education institutions without the help of private tutors or bribes. Many parents are unable to pay for the services of private tutors, while bribery and corruption in the higher education sphere put a seal on the situation and leave children from poor families behind.

Corruption in education in the Northern Caucasus mirrors national trends in the Russian Federation, yet it surpasses them in terms of scale and depth.<sup>30</sup> Interviewed teachers regularly mentioned gifts and informal payments to schools among the major costs of attending schools. Importantly, the transition from secondary schools to higher education institutions was consistently referred to as the most fertile for corruption. In fact, many teachers and university professors openly admitted that higher education entrance depended not on students' knowledge, but on their family connections and financial status. As a result, higher education institutions are often flooded by unqualified students from economically better-off families, while many gifted students from poorer families have limited or no access to higher education institutions. For example, one professor explained:

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<sup>30</sup> World Bank, *Youth in the Northern Caucasus: From risk to opportunity*. (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006): 32.

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*We use standardized testing examinations in the Russian language to admit students to many higher education programs. Many students from the Northern Caucasus republics come with the highest scores in the Russian language examination, but we later realize that they can barely speak Russian. Of course this situation leads to xenophobia of Russian population to N. Caucasians ethnic*

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### **13. Children at Risk in the Northern Caucasus Republics**

The consequences of war, prolonged ethnic tensions, and high unemployment rates have resulted in widespread post-conflict apathy among parents. They need to survive and search for food for their families, and, consequently, have little time for their children. A combination of low education levels among parents themselves and the realization that education may not necessarily secure employment opportunities in the post-Soviet economy has led to a situation where parents and children do not consider education to be a valuable asset. An example of the attitudes of some parents from Chechnya deserves particular attention. According to psychologists who organized focus groups and have a deep knowledge of the region, Vainakh (Chechen) cultural traditions place attention not on children but on adult males who are the main family bread winners. As a result, many Chechen parents do not pay enough attention to the problems of education of their children and do not demonstrate much interest in their education. They can be easily recruited even for small money to militants' activities, because they have no much choice and they get used to the military actions since 2004.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups has revealed that there are several distinct groups of children-at-risk across the Northern Caucasus republics. These groups include (1) children from low-income and poor families, (2) victims of military conflicts and ethnic tensions, (3) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), (4) children with disabilities and health problems, and (5) children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families. (see table 6 -7) in Appendix

### **14. Children from low-income and poor families**

Poverty is one of the main factors affecting education access and quality in the Northern Caucasus. Apart from the post-Soviet economic downturn (closing of factories, collective farms, mines, and other objects), the Northern Caucasus has also experienced the effects of "conflict-induced poverty." According to the Vulnerability Needs Assessment conducted in early 2005, over half of the resident population in the central districts of Chechnya lives in poverty.<sup>31</sup> Approximately eight thousand children in Chechnya live in families with an average per capita income below the minimum cost of living. Since 2001, the average monthly child benefit allowance in Chechnya has been 70 roubles (US\$2.90) for a child from a two-parent family and 140 roubles (US\$5.80) per child from a single parent family. Such a meager child benefit allowance is clearly insufficient for

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<sup>31</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, *Inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus*, p. 10.

monthly food, notwithstanding other key expenses necessary for well-being and the education of young children.

While other areas of the North Caucasus republics have not suffered wide-scale destruction associated with military hostilities such as in Chechnya, they have been in a prolonged state of economic stagnation. According to an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) study, 44% of the urban population and 66% of people living in rural areas in Dagestan are poor, with 28% of Ingushetia's urban and 48% of its rural residents living under the poverty line.<sup>32</sup> This means that young people in these three republics face poor prospects for education, personal development, and future employment because of the financial constraints faced by their families.

Interviews with teachers and education experts revealed that poverty is also an issue in other republics. For example, teachers in Kabardino-Balkaria, Adyghea, and Karachai-Cherkessiya reported that children from rural areas may not have access to quality education because their parents are unable to buy school supplies, and they may not have time to help their children with homework. In Kabardino-Balkaria, for example, approximately 50% of adults are unemployed (both in urban and rural areas) and those who are employed receive very low wages. Many parents are forced to travel and/or migrate to other cities in search of employment and, therefore, do not have the opportunity to provide their children with the necessary support in school. Children in rural areas are more vulnerable from the very beginning of the education process, because they come to schools unprepared due to a lack of preschool opportunities in the countryside and many miss school on a regular basis because they engage in various income generation activities in order to help their families survive. As one of the teachers explained:

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*Because of the low standard of living in large families, both parents and older children must work in order to feed the family, while younger children are responsible for household work and care of their younger siblings. Constant psychological stress and the urgency of making ends meet do not allow these children to study normally. Some families have the only one clothes for two children and they go to school on two shifts using this clothes one child in morning classes the other in afternoon classes.*

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## **15. Victims of military hostilities and ethnic tensions as resource of conflicts**

Given the consequences of military activities over the last decade, Chechnya has one very specific group of children-at-risk, that is children who are victims of military hostilities. Some of these children suffer psychological and physical traumas associated with war experiences. In Chechnya, for example, the total number of children in need of rehabilitation is 19,435.<sup>33</sup> Another group consists of children who dropped out from school due to military hostilities. This group is rather large and consists primarily of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Labor and Social Development, Chechen Republic Government, 2005.

children living in Grozny and rural areas where most military hostilities occurred in the second half of the 1990s. Given that full-scale hostilities of various intensity were carried out in Chechnya from 1994 to 2000, all school age children who should have attended school during this period fall into this risk group. According to our estimates, this group could be as large as 200,000 children.<sup>34</sup> Many of these children now do not have basic education skills and need a special curriculum combining professional training and formal instruction. One mother described the dire education experience of her son who is now an unemployed 23 year old:

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*What education exactly are we talking about? My son finished three grades before the first war<sup>35</sup> in Grozny and two more grades after the first war. A total of five grades. I did not let him attend school because of bombing threats. I myself taught him grammar. He knows basic mathematics and formulas. But, he has no knowledge of chemistry and physics. We left Chechnya after the second war.*

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In addition to military conflicts, educational opportunities can also be disrupted by ongoing ethnic tensions in other parts of the Northern Caucasus republics. For example, one of the focus groups conducted for this study was held in a village of North Ossetia-Alania and reflected the complex problems of the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. It is a half Ingush and half Ossetian village located in the Prigorodnyi district of North Ossetia-Alania, and it is notorious for its bloody fights and Ingush migration to Ingushetiya. While many Ingush families left the village, some of them remained. Their children attend a special school for Ingush students only, while the rest of the students attend a North-Ossetian school. Ethnic mixing is not encouraged and can be dangerous. Ingush children have to rely on special bus transportation, which takes them through the Ossetian part of the village to their school. If a child misses the school bus, she cannot get to school on her own because of security concerns. Given that children are brought to school for a limited period of time daily, the school cannot organize any extra curricula activities and children miss out on many education experiences. Furthermore, children grow up in the constant fear of ethnic tensions and clashes, which has adverse effects on their psychological well-being and upbringing.

## **16. Problems of Children of Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)**

In republics that to varying extent have experienced hostilities (Chechnya, Ingushetia, Ossetia, and Dagestan) tensions linger and tend to increase and relations among children are affected by the fact.

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<sup>34</sup> This number was calculated based on the number of children born in the countryside from 1987 to 1994, who belonged to a demographic cohort of 10-14 year olds at the time of military hostilities (approximately 13 600 persons). In addition, all children who lived in Grozny city (constituting approximately 30% of all residents of Grozny) belong to the risk group, since schools and other education facilities were completely destroyed during military hostilities. Combined, children from rural areas and Grozny constitute approximately 200,000 children.

<sup>35</sup> In Russia the government does not use word “War” with regard to the Chechen conflict, but call it “anti militias operations.” The locals call it the “first and second Chechen war.”

In Ossetia problems of refugees from Georgia and South Ossetia are far from being solved. Children of refugees have the same problems as their parents, children of the first wave refugees have. According to teachers and psychologists, children of refugees are prone to excessive aggressive reactions, they lack an interest for learning, they have a weak motivation to learning (their parents share this characteristic too), they have poor command of their mother tongue and other languages. Teachers say that the corruption principle reigns supreme. This principle is described by Russian abbreviation □□□-□□□ which means ‘job arranged or negotiated by father, job arranged or negotiated by mother’.

Nowadays religious conflicts are identified only in Prigorodnyi district. Teachers’ efforts and permanent tolerance lessons bring their fruits. Gradually such conflicts disappear from schools. Nevertheless sneers and conflicts among children, according to teachers’ opinion, are more often related to social stratification, the natives of South Ossetia, especially to those who are much influence by Georgians and speak Russian and Ossetian poorly.

The new wave of refugees from South Ossetia in 2008 demonstrated that the local community accepts and treats the refugees better than previously. Because children have experience stresses they are very aggressive and very nervous. It is difficult to manage such children. As teachers say, children are very noisy, socially neglected and not interested in learning. The children themselves for whom focus groups were organized note that the greatest negative moment they experience at schools is that teachers put the squeeze on them permanently.

There are no official statistics on the total number of refugees and IDPs in the Northern Caucasus republics, and the existing data fluctuates between 78,000 and 112,000 (see Table 7). Official registration is impeded by the Russian authorities’ unwillingness to recognize refugee status and grant it to all people in need. As a result, many refugees and IDPs stay with their relatives without official registration, fearing that they may be sent back to their home republics. According to our estimates,<sup>36</sup> the number of refugee and IDP children could be from 11,700-16,800. The number of refugee and IDP children in Ingushetiya is estimated to be around 37.5% of the total number of children.<sup>37</sup> Refugees and IDPs in rural areas experience some of the highest rates of poverty. For example, Dagestan has the highest levels of poverty among IDPs, with 56% in urban areas and 72% in rural areas being classified as very poor, compared with 52% and 49% respectively for IDPs in Chechnya.<sup>38</sup> Most of refugees and IDPs survive by relying on debt, social welfare, remittances from relatives, humanitarian assistance, and subsistence farming to meet their basic needs.

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<sup>36</sup> This calculation was done based on the demographic structure of the local population of the republics affected by conflicts. According to the census we estimate the share of children of different age groups.

<sup>37</sup> Census 2002 Goskomstat, Russia.

<sup>38</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, *Inter-agency transitional workplan for the Northern Caucasus*, p. 25.

Chechen republics' teachers indicated problems related, first of all, with the consequences of hostilities and military operations. These problems affect the educational process on the whole. The total number of children who needed rehabilitation comprised of 19,435 persons. Of these, 1,529 children were orphans, 8,982 children were invalids and 8,924 children were abandoned and uncared.<sup>39</sup> Help is provided for only 420 children. Eight thousand children live in families with an average per capita income which is below of the republican minimum cost of living. Since 2001, the average monthly allowance for a child is 70 roubles (which is the equivalent of \$2.90) and 140 roubles (\$5.80) for a child of a single mother. It is not enough even for normal feeding.

Table 7. The Number of Refugees and IDPs in the North Caucasian republics, 2006.

Republics	Estimated Number of Refugees and IDPs
Republic of Chechnya	47,675 (NRC) – 60,100(Government)
Republic of Dagestan	6,017 (DRC) – 8,526 (UNHCR)
Republic of Ingushetiya	23,306 (DRC) – 42,678 (NRC)
Republic of Ossetia-Alania	1,200 (Memorial)
Total	78,198 -112,504

Notes: NRC – Norwegian Refugee Council; DRC –Danish Refugee Council

Sources: [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

Given the financial constraints faced by their families, many refugee and IDP children have limited access to education. Some parents have insufficient funds for school supplies; the other parents do not allow their children to attend remote schools due to security concerns. More alarmingly, many IDP children in temporary settlements (i.e. refugee camps) continue to rely on education services provided by international organizations and NGOs. In Ingushetiya, for example, the number of IDP children attending schools in temporary settlements reached over 1,500 in 2006.<sup>40</sup>

### **17. Children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families**

The results of the focus groups with teachers and in –depth interviews indicated that children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families constitute a fairly large group in the Northern Caucasus, ranging from 10% to 40% depending on the specific republic. In Chechnya, many children were orphaned during the military conflicts and are now surviving on their own or live with relatives. Of the total number of children in need

<sup>39</sup> Social and psychological examination of Chechen Republic's children who have got psychological traumas due to hostilities (2006). UNICEF, Groznyi-Nazran' - Stavropol, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> UNICEF Humanitarian Action, *North Caucasus donor update*, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/NC\\_Final\\_DU\\_13Jul06.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/NC_Final_DU_13Jul06.pdf) (2006).

of rehabilitation (19,435) in Chechnya, 1,529 children were orphans, and 8,924 children were abandoned and/or lacked parental care.<sup>41</sup> Assistance has been provided for only 420 children, leaving the majority of children from socially disadvantaged and marginalized families without any financial or psychological support.

## **Conclusions**

The issues we discuss in the paper which influences the access to quality of education and as consequence the future of children to choose militancy or peaceful life not always directly linked to the ethnic relations in schools and in education. Nevertheless the historical memory of ethnic groups in N.Caucasus plays the important role in all aspects of their life because there are many unsolved problems emerged from Stalin time and they are still vivid.

The dissolution of USSR led to separatist attempts of ethnic leaders to create independent states and turned many ethnic groups into conflicts each other and federal center. These conflicts created massive population flows out and into different republics of N. Caucasus. This situation deteriorated social and economic satiation in republics which had to host them. Refugee and internally displaced peoples' children are the most vulnerable and big group in Chechnya, N.Ossetia, Dagestan and Ingushetia and often are abundant by schools and by the society.

Mass exoduses of ethnic Russian population weaken the fragile economy and education of the N. Caucasus republics and multiethnic region faced to the language issue. Often children do not know properly neither Russian nor their ethnic language. Widespread corruption in education rise frustration among youth. In opposite to this phenomenon the strengthen of Islam influence and development of Muslim religious education gives to frustrated disadvantaged youth a chance to earn money, to get good education and prospects for future. Unfortunately Islam dissemination affects in negative way the female opportunities for education because of early and often forced marriages and poor participation of female youth in school activities .

Long –Term conflicts in N. Caucasus republics transformed the society traditions and values. Many youth who dropped out of education during the two decades of disorders have gloomy prospects in peaceful society and can be easily recruited for different terrorist activities because of lack of other opportunities.

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<sup>41</sup> UNICEF, *A Social and psychological examination of the Chechen Republic's children who have psychological traumas due to hostilities* (Stavropol, 2005).

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