

# Moscow Refugee School

Центр Адаптации и Обучения Детей Беженцев и Вынужденных Переселенцев  
The Centre for Adaptation and Education of Refugees' and Forced Migrants' Children



**Hamzat is 11 years old.** He fled to Moscow from Grozny together with his two brothers and sisters, his parents and grandparents. He now lives in a two-room flat in a block on the edge of the city. Their own **house** was completely destroyed during the war. Although he is so young he has already gone through a lot. The refugee children are in constant fear of being attacked or insulted. They avoid certain places in Moscow and do not go out at all on days when there are military parades. These experiences shape their lives.

The situation for refugees in Russia is shocking: daily **discrimination** by the authorities, police, and local population, refused residence permits and registration documents – often refugees must fight very hard for their right to stay. The pressure this puts on the family inevitably affects the children.

For precisely this reason the refugee school is not just an after-school tuition centre but also **a refuge and a meeting place**. Demand is so great that there are children on waiting lists and the few rooms are totally full. Improvisation is the name of the day. Lessons, games, advice sessions and administration take place everywhere – even the corridor and the waiting area outside the tiny office are used.

As they say in Russia: hope is the last thing to die.

The situation for refugees in the RF remains hopeless. The Refugee School, where Aktion Sühnezeichen volunteers have been working for the last three years, is almost the only organization of the kind in Moscow. However, its work is limited due to lack of sufficient funding.

At the refugee school, children from Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Armenia and other countries receive tuition three times a week. Russian volunteers teach the children Russian and maths. A handful of international volunteers help the children make progress in English. Many of the children have poor concentration, attention and memory due to the stress they suffered during the war and while escaping, so the school is assisted by psychologists.

The refugee school is a project run by the *Civic Assistance Committee*, one of the most active organisation currently engaged with refugees' problems in Russia. Legal advice, counselling in times of crisis, donated clothes and a listening ear are available at the Committee. Above all, the centre demonstrates that some Russians can and do help Chechens and other migrants. In 2004 the Chairwoman of the Committee won the UNHCR Nansen Prize for its work with refugees.

We believe the school needs our help – and yours too! The generosity of private donors enabled the school organize a New Year party and give children presents, buy books and stationery this year. If everyone makes a small donation, we could supply food at the school for the next year and meet other needs. Maybe you have contacts in companies in Russia and Germany who would like to make donations in kind, such as books, furniture, developmental toys.

The refugee school has a real need. We will use the money collected to buy goods cheaply in Moscow, so that literally every penny which we collect benefits the children. It would be great if you could help too!

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