

EASTERN EUROPE



UNHCR

2013 GLOBAL REPORT

- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Belarus
- Georgia
- Republic of Moldova
- Russian Federation
- Turkey
- Ukraine



A family of Syrian refugees in their container house with a new heater in Malatya camp, Turkey

UNHCR / A. AKAD



| Overview |

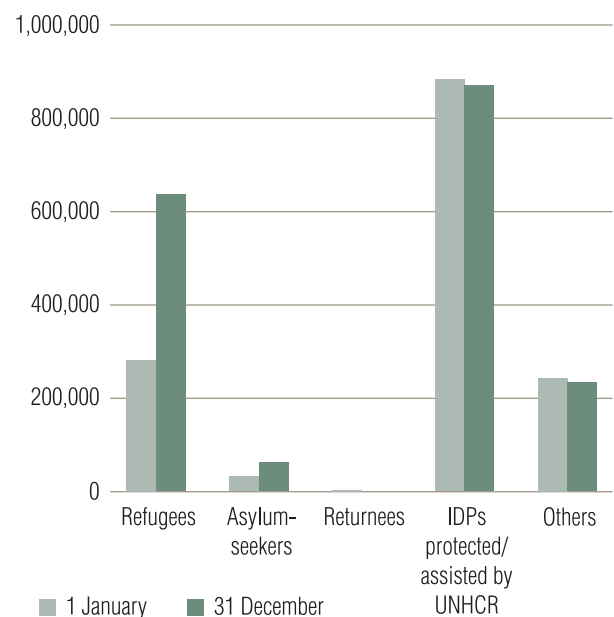


Highlights

- A two-year Quality Initiative Project, which began as a pilot in February 2013 to improve the quality of decisions in refugee status determination (RSD), continued in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. As part of the project, ongoing assessments of the quality of the asylum procedure were conducted, and strategies implemented to address shortcomings and ensure effective and reliable RSD procedures and decisions.
- The impact of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) on UNHCR operations in the subregion became apparent, particularly in Armenia, which was hosting approximately 11,000 Syrians at year-end. The most vulnerable Syrian refugees in Armenia benefitted from assistance provided by UNHCR in cooperation with the Government and NGOs.

- Georgia's revised law on internally displaced people (IDPs) incorporated a range of international standards, ensuring additional benefits for IDPs, improving allowances, and increasing the focus on durable solutions.
- The Government of Georgia, supported by UNHCR, launched a countrywide re-registration of all IDPs. This exercise will be completed in early 2014. Ukraine acceded to both UN Statelessness Conventions in 2013.

People of concern to UNHCR in Eastern Europe | 2013



| Results in 2013 |

Working environment

Following Georgia's October 2013 presidential elections, various legislative issues of concern to UNHCR moved forward. However, increased fencing along the dividing line in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia significantly restricted the freedom of movement and livelihood means of populations living in affected villages. UNHCR therefore had to focus interventions on the assistance needs of affected households.

In November, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers suspended preparations for signing its Association Agreement with the European Union (EU), triggering mass protests in Kyiv and other major cities and resulting in political turmoil. This situation generated concern among refugees and asylum-seekers in Ukraine.

Although the presidential election in Azerbaijan was the main focus of the Government's attention and priorities for most of 2013, the Office's programmes and activities were conducted as planned. However, the increasing cost of living in Baku affected the capacity of people of concern to adapt and integrate locally.

The situation in Armenia remained generally stable, although a relatively large influx of arrivals from Syria had a notable impact.

UNHCR began reviewing a new draft asylum law in the Russian Federation to analyse its impact on the protection of refugee rights and procedural guarantees in the country. The analysis will be shared with the Government in 2014.

Asylum systems in Eastern Europe remained fragile and therefore vulnerable to political changes and sensitivities. Issues of concern to the Office included access to territory, asylum procedures, instances of *refoulement* and abduction, as well as low recognition rates.

Achievements and impact

The implementation of a two-year (2013-2014) Quality Initiative Project in Eastern Europe (QIEE) helped improve recognition rates in Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The development and use of checklists, instructions and standard operating procedures in these countries strengthened their commitment to quality assurance in asylum procedures.

UNHCR met the most pressing winter and health-care needs of more than 3,600 Syrians in Armenia.

In the Russian Federation, 861 individuals were identified as "legacy cases", i.e. long-staying people in need of international protection and comprehensive solutions. Of these, 784 people were assessed and 225 were found to be in need of international protection. UNHCR lobbied for accession to the UN Statelessness

Conventions and supported Government efforts to reduce statelessness by facilitating the acquisition of nationality for former Soviet citizens.

Close partnerships with the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and counterparts in the Geneva International Discussions, helped ensure that almost 2,000 families along the dividing line in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in Georgia could meet their immediate winter and livelihood needs.

Ukraine's accession to both UN Statelessness Conventions presented opportunities for progress in the legislative framework for reducing statelessness and protecting stateless people in the country.

Constraints

Although international protection principles were in place, many Eastern European countries prioritized political considerations and migration control over asylum. Administrative structures often focused on curbing migration flows, and the allocation of resources to priorities other than the national asylum system made it difficult for governments to comply with international refugee protection standards. As a consequence, sometimes refugees and asylum-seekers could not access appropriate procedures. Restrictive registration policies meant long waiting periods, during which asylum-seekers lacked appropriate documentation or legal status and could not benefit from State assistance or enter local labour markets. Hence, many remained dependent on UNHCR for support. Resource constraints and a lack of local integration schemes for recognized refugees in the region hindered integration as a durable solution, as did xenophobia and racism.

The massive increase in Turkey's Syrian refugee population (700,000 in total, including some 560,000 registered at year-end), particularly in urban areas, necessitated rapid response and cooperation with government structures and NGOs. There was also a significant increase in non-Syrian asylum-seekers. The spill-over effect of the Syrian crisis was increasingly felt throughout Eastern Europe – particularly in Armenia.

Operations

The operation in **Turkey** is covered in a separate country chapter.

As Syrians continued arriving in **Armenia** (11,000 by year-end), significant efforts were made to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. UNHCR's close partnership with the government authorities, donor community, civil society, people of concern and others, enabled it to assist more than 3,600 Syrians with essential winter support and greater medical services.

A survey on the situation of women and families displaced from Syria seeking protection in Armenia was commissioned by UNHCR in 2013 and conducted by the Armenian research think tank “International Centre for Human Development.” Its results showed that 18 per cent of women displaced from Syria experienced sexual and/or gender-based violence (SGBV) prior, during or after flight, however only 2.5 per cent of incidents were experienced after arrival in Armenia. It also suggested that up to 18 per cent of children were not attending school. UNHCR together with the Armenian Red Cross Society, State Migration Service and a variety of local NGOs developed standard operating procedures to improve response to SGBV.

UNHCR assisted asylum authorities to improve the RSD procedure and provided comments on legislative and procedural gaps, which the authorities committed to addressing in 2014. Eighty-nine refugees were selected to receive individual business grants for business training, 300 attended job fairs, and 47 participated in vocational training.

The Office provided comments on the citizenship law to ensure compliance with the 1961 Convention, and significant progress was made towards the adoption of a law on statelessness.

The implementation of the QIEE project in **Azerbaijan** yielded positive results in 2013 and the newly adopted Migration Code included a provision on residence registration for people of concern. This represented a step towards introducing a subsidiary protection regime, but challenges remained. UNHCR continued conducting parallel mandate RSD for asylum-seekers of Chechen ethnicity from the Russian Federation, owing to difficulties they faced in admission to the national asylum procedure. Access to basic services remained restricted, thereby necessitating UNHCR’s support with the provision of health, financial, educational and legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers.

To highlight the causes of statelessness in the country and the challenges faced by stateless people, the Office published a report prepared by an NGO working with stateless people. At the same time, it continued to register individuals at risk of statelessness and provided legal aid to those deemed vulnerable.

Given the Government’s focus on IDPs, UNHCR worked to ensure this population’s access to protection (through legal information, counselling and assistance, and vocational training and income-generating activities). In 2013, the Government, NGOs and UN actors jointly assessed the needs of 1,643 IDPs in 10 rural and urban locations, gaining insight into the realities experienced by IDPs and facilitating discussion on effective responses and assistance needs.

UNHCR introduced systematic protection monitoring in western **Georgia**, including Abkhazia – enabling an exchange of information with people of concern.

Such direct access to feedback from people of concern contributed to a more targeted needs response.

The challenge posed by the increased fencing along the dividing line with the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia prompted an assessment of 55 affected villages. Following this, nearly 2,000 households received immediate winter and livelihood assistance. Cooperation with UNDP on joint livelihood projects was extended to western Georgia and demonstrated the validity of supporting local development for all inhabitants of the area, rather than providing limited humanitarian assistance to IDPs only.

UNHCR continued to support the Government in developing and improving legislation to simplify the naturalization process for refugees and stateless people and in implementing the statelessness determination procedure that was adopted in 2012. The revised law on IDPs provided additional benefits, with emphasis on durable solutions. According to the Government, approximately 90,000 IDPs were still in need of housing. The Government launched a re-registration of IDPs with UNHCR support and substantially improved the registration process.

Direct protection assistance provided during 2013 met the immediate needs of over 400 vulnerable protection cases.

UNHCR pursued a new partnership with the **Russian Federation**, both in relation to its domestic agenda for refugees, returnees and the prevention and reduction of statelessness, as well as on global cooperation. It advised the authorities on RSD and maintained a targeted litigation strategy.

The Office pursued the development of a solutions strategy for long-staying people in need of international protection. An assessment helped identify cases with protection needs, including individuals originating from areas of generalized violence and those for whom return to specific regions in their countries of origin (e.g. Afghanistan) could pose serious risks. By year-end, 784 of 861 people identified for review had been assessed, of whom 225 required international protection, including 87 who needed resettlement.

Partnerships with the UN Country Team and NGOs, as well as with federal, regional and municipal authorities and the media encouraged a favourable environment for integration by reflecting on the issue of xenophobia and using inter-agency working groups (on social/age, gender and diversity mainstreaming, and tolerance) as platforms to implement UNHCR’s urban refugee policy. Legal partnerships in the Russian Federation for asylum-seekers and the prevention and reduction of statelessness were also maintained.

In the North Caucasus, UNHCR counselled refugees and other people of concern on their voluntary repatriation or local integration. The Office also lobbied for accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions.

A specific monitoring mechanism, previously established through partnerships with national NGOs, helped to identify and provide appropriate assistance to groups with specific needs (e.g. single women, elderly, unaccompanied minors, chronically ill people and SGBV survivors).

UNHCR strengthened its partnership with the Government authorities in **Belarus**, the **Republic of Moldova** and **Ukraine**, with the long-term aim of building asylum systems that meet international standards.

As a result of the QIEE, which included intensive training on RSD, recognition practices improved considerably in Belarus and the Republic of Moldova. Nearly all applicants from Syria were granted international protection. Ukraine improved its recognition rates for Syrians, which reached approximately 40 per cent.

There were no cases of *refoulement* reported in Ukraine in 2013. This was primarily attributed to amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure in Ukraine, which strengthened the protection of asylum-seekers in the context of extradition proceedings.

Implementation of the EU-funded Regional Protection Programme and Local Integration Programme contributed to raising the quality of protection provided to refugees and asylum-seekers in the three countries. Areas in which improvements were noted included: cooperation with relevant authorities on RSD; coordination between border and asylum authorities and fewer cases of detention of asylum-seekers at the borders; and the authorities' demonstrated interest and political will towards integrating refugees locally.

With inadequate reception conditions, UNHCR continued to provide material assistance to the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers. Efforts were made to strengthen the multi-functional team which monitors SGBV cases identified by partners and refugees.

Ukraine acceded to the two UN Statelessness Conventions. A study on the reduction of statelessness in Ukraine highlighted gaps in legislation and procedures that contributed to the difficulties faced by former Soviet citizens in acquiring nationality. The Republic of Moldova also began to implement a statelessness determination procedure.

Financial information

UNHCR's initial financial requirements for Eastern Europe in 2013 of USD 89.2 million increased to USD 271 million by the end of the year. This included USD 207.7 million of UNHCR's requirements under the Syrian Regional Response Plan for 2013. The available

funding allowed for expenditure of USD 93.8 million, 73 per cent of this amount being allocated to the operation in Turkey. This left significant gaps in UNHCR's response in many operations in Eastern Europe.

Budget and expenditure in Eastern Europe | USD

Operation		PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 2 Stateless programme	PILLAR 4 IDP projects	Total
Armenia	Budget	4,238,618	83,192	0	4,321,810
	Expenditure	1,843,891	83,192	0	1,927,082
Azerbaijan	Budget	4,528,287	323,577	1,048,633	5,900,497
	Expenditure	2,992,580	55,337	289,860	3,337,776
Georgia	Budget	2,188,385	802,505	12,027,628	15,018,517
	Expenditure	1,524,639	558,926	4,902,468	6,986,033
Russian Federation	Budget	7,838,378	593,503	0	8,431,881
	Expenditure	5,449,288	517,712	0	5,967,000
Turkey	Budget	225,385,010	173,391	0	225,558,401
	Expenditure	68,282,276	41,170	0	68,323,446
Ukraine Regional Office ¹	Budget	10,407,276	1,315,000	0	11,722,276
	Expenditure	6,968,569	298,813	0	7,267,382
Total budget		254,585,954	3,291,168	13,076,261	270,953,382
Total expenditure		87,061,243	1,555,149	5,192,328	93,808,719

¹ Includes activities in Belarus and Republic of Moldova.

Voluntary contributions to Eastern Europe | USD

Earmarking / Donor	PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 4 IDP projects	All pillars	Total
ARMENIA				
Armenia			98,172	98,172
European Union	26,214			26,214
Russian Federation			50,000	50,000
United States of America	200,000			200,000
ARMENIA Total	226,214		148,172	374,386
AZERBAIJAN				
Azerbaijan	6,948			6,948
European Union	60,227			60,227
Norway		36,783		36,783
AZERBAIJAN Total	67,174	36,783		103,957
GEORGIA				
Netherlands		1,364,177		1,364,177
Private donors in Switzerland			522	522
Switzerland		539,957		539,957
United States of America			864,000	864,000
GEORGIA Total		1,904,134	864,522	2,768,656
RUSSIAN FEDERATION				
Russian Federation			50,000	50,000
RUSSIAN FEDERATION Total			50,000	50,000
TURKEY				
Australia	719,040			719,040
Canada	1,407,095			1,407,095
China	1,000,000			1,000,000
Estonia	165,563			165,563
European Union	5,572,816			5,572,816
Ireland	654,450			654,450
Japan	7,500,000			7,500,000
Kuwait	10,752,688		125,000	10,877,688
Portugal	108,696			108,696
Switzerland	870,511			870,511
United States of America	42,235,180			42,235,180
TURKEY Total	70,986,040		125,000	71,111,040
UKRAINE REGIONAL OFFICE				
European Union	1,274,068			1,274,068
Russian Federation			50,000	50,000
UKRAINE REGIONAL OFFICE Total	1,274,068		50,000	1,324,068
Total	72,553,496	1,940,917	1,237,694	75,732,107

Note: Includes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions to Pillars 3 and 4, supplementary budgets and the "New or additional activities – mandate-related" (NAM)