

SPCP Southern Caucasus Armenia Update February 2008

Background

In July 2007 UNHCR introduced the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project in the Southern Caucasus (SPCP-SC) to help strengthen protection responses to forced displacement in the region.

In Armenia it focuses on bringing migration and asylum systems fully into compliance with international standards and accelerating durable solutions for refugees and naturalised refugees.

The SPCP-SC initiative in Armenia is supported by the European Commission. It builds on previous collaborative initiatives which highlighted the need to reinforce reception capacity, improve the accuracy and collection of data on refugees, as well as to enhance the socio-economic integration of naturalised refugees.

Methodology

SPCP-SC relies on a consultative methodology involving governmental, international and national partners as well as refugees at every stage of its development. It proceeds from an initial identification of gaps in protection to the design of specific interventions to remedy those gaps.

Activities

Gap analysis and consultation

UNHCR Armenia has conducted a comprehensive analysis of the gaps in protection faced by refugees, to be published in late March. Its findings will feed into national consultations with governmental, international and national partners and act as a reference for tracking progress in strengthening protection.

Following national consultations, UNHCR will work with the Government and its partners in refugee protection to develop a comprehensive plan of action and projects

that make tangible improvements to the situation of refugees and others of concern.

Ensuring accurate refugee data

Accurate demographic data on displaced populations is essential when planning responses to refugee problems. SPCP-SC has supported a census conducted jointly by the Government of Armenia and UNHCR of refugees and naturalised refugees from Azerbaijan. The census will update previous refugee statistics from 1997 and will be used to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the outstanding protection needs of the population of concern. Census results will be finalised in spring 2008.



Refugees participating in the Refugee Census

Improving registration systems

One of the protection gaps identified by the Government of Armenia and UNHCR is the absence of an electronic registration system. SPCP-SC will support the establishment of an electronic registration system in order to enhance the accurate storage and retrieval of refugee data, as well as easier analysis of vulnerabilities and protection needs among those of concern.

Improving reception conditions for asylum-seekers

The existing reception facilities in Armenia have insufficient capacity to provide increasing numbers of asylum seekers with adequate accommodation and assistance during the determination of their claims. There is an acute need to repair and extend current facilities. UNHCR and its

implementing partner the Young Men's Christian Association started renovation activities in December 2007 with SPCP-SC support.



The renovation of reception facilities is underway

Brutal winter conditions have caused damage to water pipes and delayed reconstruction works. Additional funds will be required in order to complete the renovation activities to adequate standards.



Repairs to the Reception Centre are urgently needed

Developing administrative capacity to identify and refer refugee claims

Ensuring safe admission of asylum seekers at the border is one of the key principles of refugee protection. The development of administrative capacity at the border is a priority for both the Government of Armenia and UNHCR. SPCP-SC aims to strengthen cooperation and share best practices that

enable border officials to identify and refer asylum claims.

In December 2007 UNHCR conducted trainings for Armenian border guards deployed at the border with Georgia to familiarise those that have first contact with asylum seekers with the principles of international protection and the role of border police in referring refugee claims.



Workshop for Border Guards, December 2007, Alaverdi

A round table discussion jointly organised in January 2008 by the Government of Armenia and UNHCR on "International Refugee Law and Standards in Admission of Refugees and Asylum Seekers" focused on sensitising key decision-makers on Armenia's international obligations at the border, laying the way for future capacity building measures. High level officials from Passport and Visa Department of the police, National Security Services, the Border Troops of the Federal National Security Services of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Territorial Administration participated in the event.

More information on the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project, including the Southern Caucasus initiative can be found at www.unhcr.org/spcp