

SPCP Southern Caucasus Armenia Update June 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, building up the capacity of key holders of the government and the civil society and accelerating durable solutions for refugees and naturalised refugees.

To date, the SPCP-SC initiative in Armenia has been supported by the European Commission and Danish Refugee Council. 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 October. 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 summer 2008.

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 is supporting 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

UNHCR and the Youth Men's Christian Association have almost completed works to renovate and expand reception facilities for asylum seekers in Yerevan. Once, finalised, the facilities will provide much-needed accommodation to increasing numbers of asylum seekers. A number of basic services will also be available to asylum seekers at the facility for the determination of their claims.



Works on the Reception Centre are almost complete



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.

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 high-level decision-makers on Armenia’s international obligations at the border, laying the way for future capacity building measures.

UNHCR and the State Migration Agency are jointly planning three additional trainings for border guards in Summer and Autumn 2008. A working group consisting of representatives of key governmental agencies involved in border management will be established in July 2008 in order to make recommendations on needed improvements to existing law and practice.

Expanding self-reliance to promote local integration

The full integration of refugees who have naturalised in Armenia remains challenging due to the difficult economic situation in the country. Increasing opportunities for self-reliance for former-refugees can expand the overall wellbeing of vulnerable households and foster greater social and economic participation within the community.

With the support of the Danish Refugee Council, an international livelihood

consultant conducted an assessment of livelihood opportunities for refugees, former refugees and host communities in rural areas of Armenia in May/June 2008. The assessment highlighted the socio-economic vulnerability of refugees, due to many factors including lack of economic tools, inadequate shelter and limited access to water. The consultant's findings will feed into national consultations on refugee protection. Recommendations for project interventions to expand rural livelihoods and promote greater economic integration been shared with the UN economic theme group to feed into ongoing development strategies.

Developing partnership with Universities

UNHCR, the SMA and Universities have developed a partnership in order to encourage the academia to participate in the asylum debate.

UNHCR conducted three workshops on “International Refugee and Asylum Law” to build up the capacity of law professors in the field of asylum and refugee law in 2007 and 2008. As a result in 2008, some universities have included refugee and asylum law in their curriculum, have established refugee legal aid clinic and plan to conduct academic researches on asylum.



Workshop to develop academic expertise on asylum and refugee law

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