

Georgia



Main Objectives

Protect and assist Chechen refugees and support the Government in implementing the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Support the conflict-resolution process sponsored by the OSCE in Georgia/South Ossetia and facilitate the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons from South Ossetia and Georgia proper. Support the conflict-resolution process sponsored by the UN in Georgia/Abkhazia; draw upon the Georgian Self-Reliance Fund to seek durable solutions for IDPs by promoting integration in their current places of residence (without prejudice to their eventual return); monitor the process of spontaneous return to Gali District and provide limited material assistance. Seek improvements to the refugee law

and asylum procedures and help government structures and NGOs build up sufficient resources and expertise to respond to involuntary displacement; promote accession to the conventions relating to statelessness.

Impact

Refugees and Asylum-seekers

- In November 2001, the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation drafted amendments to the law on refugees, but the parliamentary debate on them was delayed. Training and seminars were organised for the authorities, judges and lawyers on international refugee law and refugee status determination procedure, with the aim of improving national asylum procedures. As a

result, governmental bodies and others were better equipped to deal with legal issues concerning persons of concern to UNHCR.

- As of 31 December 2001, 7,882 Chechens were registered with the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) as prima facie refugees (1,646 more than in August). The 7,570 refugees living in the Pankisi Valley were provided with the same general level of assistance as in 2000, despite the deteriorating security situation.
- UNHCR assistance helped the local community to accommodate more than 80 per cent of the refugees in their own homes for over two years. In 2001, more activities were introduced to cover the needs of both the refugee and host community populations; this helped to reduce potential tension between the two groups.
- A major focus in 2001 was on strengthening community structures and cohesion by focusing on the specific gender and age needs of refugees and locals, through a summer ecological camp, training for peace-building in schools, as well as kindergartens to alleviate the daily burdens on females, heads of households.
- No Meskhetians returned to Georgia during 2001 and the legal status of 32 persons who returned some years ago remained unresolved. The introduction of new legislation was delayed.

Returnees and IDPs (Georgian-Osset Conflict)

- Of 425 persons who returned in 2001, 141 Osset refugees returned from North Ossetia (Russian

Federation) to South Ossetia and 284 IDPs returned from Georgia proper to their homes in South Ossetia. UNHCR's rehabilitation assistance gave returnees the opportunity to rebuild their lives in their places of origin. This allowed them to meet their basic needs and increased the likelihood that their return will be permanent.

Returnees and IDPs (Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict)

- In support of the UN-led peace process, UNHCR initiated a modest assistance programme in Gali District where, for the third time since the early 1990s, 40,000-50,000 persons spontaneously returned. For the second consecutive year since the hostilities of 1998, when homes and communal infrastructure were razed to the ground for the second time, many decided to stay in the District during the winter season. UNHCR started to rehabilitate 24 schools and distributed classroom equipment and 1,139 stationery kits. The impact was dramatic: 3,416 returnee children (hitherto not in school) could now resume their education. In Georgia proper, programmes targeted areas with the highest density of IDPs, with the aim of creating viable sources of income. A total of 2,379 IDPs and 1,580 locals benefited from ten co-operative income-generation projects, allowing them greater self-sufficiency.
- The pilot Georgian Self-Reliance Fund (GSRF) established in 2000 as part of the New Approach to IDPs in Georgia (to bridge the gap between humanitarian assistance and development), received and analysed the first project proposals. However, no projects were implemented during the year.

Persons of Concern				
Main Origin/ Type of Population	Total in Country ¹	Of whom UNHCR assisted ²	Per cent Female	Per cent under 18
Russian Federation/ Chechnya (Refugees)	7,900	7,900	52	48
Georgia (IDPs) ³	264,200	-	55	26
Formerly Deported Meskhetians ⁴	32	-	-	-

¹ Government statistics

² Figures reflect only material assistance

³ Includes some 250,000 IDPs and returnees from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. An estimated 40,000 IDPs have returned spontaneously to Gali District. Also includes some 7,000 IDPs and refugees from the Georgian-Osset conflict. In 2001, 425 refugees and IDPs returned to their places of origin in South Ossetia and Georgia proper.

⁴ Stateless persons. In total, some 650 formerly deported Meskhetians have returned to Georgia.

Income and Expenditure (USD)				
Revised Budget	Income from Contributions ¹	Other Funds Available ²	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure
6,235,267	739,443	5,084,502	5,823,945	5,663,945

¹ Government statistics

² Figures reflect only material assistance

Working Environment

The Context

The Government's attitude towards refugees from Chechnya was positive and no attempts to prevent Chechens from entering Georgia from the Russian Federation were observed by UNHCR or reported. UNHCR's opera-

tions in the Pankisi Valley, however, were affected by insecurity, which obliged UNHCR to withdraw the head of the field office. UNHCR remained unable to promote repatriation to Chechnya, as its pre-conditions for a safe and dignified return were not met.

The protracted conflicts in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia have not been solved, despite a number of initiatives taken by the UN and OSCE to promote consensus between the parties involved. The election of a new self-declared "president" in South Ossetia in December 2001 did not contribute to the conflict resolution process. Due to the unresolved political disputes and the harsh economic situation prevailing in the returnee areas, many ethnic Osset refugees remained hesitant to return to South Ossetia. Since 1997, UNHCR has facilitated the return to South Ossetia and Georgia proper of 1,270 families (some 6,350 persons) out of a displaced population of sixty thousand. This disappointing

olutions confirming the rights of the IDPs to return to their places of origin in safety and dignity. It is estimated that half of the IDP population live in collective centres and the rest reside with friends or families. Most of the estimated 40,000 IDPs who have returned spontaneously to Gali District continued to reside in Western Georgia and shuttle between Georgia proper and the Gali District to farm their plots of land during the agricultural season. IDPs have the same rights as other Georgian citizens with regard to healthcare, education and employment. In addition, the authorities distribute token monthly allowances.

Georgia acceded to the Council of Europe in 1999 and agreed to adopt a legal framework within the following two years permitting repatriation and integration of the formerly deported Meskhetian population. Of the small number who returned in previous years, 644 persons decided to stay, while others left the country (for various destinations).

UNHCR has been involved in the legislative process with the aim of ensuring that any return will be voluntary and well informed. The draft law, which was supposed to come into force in January 2002, is still under discussion, and the Council of Europe is providing input on the amendments needed to improve the current draft.

Constraints

Increasing tensions between the Chechen refugees and the local population resulted in several protests by communities from the Pankisi Valley demanding a clamp-down by the central

authorities on criminality (including kidnapping) in the area. Access to the Valley was restricted, and UNHCR and WFP assistance was delayed, as road-blocks prevented the distribution of essential food and non-food items. Direct protection and programme monitoring by UNHCR also suffered because of restricted access. In South Ossetia, the low rate of return, both from the Russian Federation and from Georgia proper, could be attributed to the absence of a political solution to the conflict, and to



IDPs from Abkhazia in a former office building rehabilitated by UNHCR in Zugdidi.
UNHCR / A. Hollmann

result led UNHCR, in 2001, to reduce its staff and terminate its field presence in Gori and Tskhinvali. Of the 252,352 IDPs registered by the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation as being displaced as a result of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in 1992-93, some 107,000 are in Samegrelo, 86,000 in Tbilisi and 32,000 in Imereti. The 1994 Quadripartite Agreement between the conflicting parties, Russia and UNHCR remained relevant and UNHCR continued to be guided by the UN Security Council res-

the economic and social decline, manifest in a drastic fall in living standards. While the overall security situation in South Ossetia remained generally stable, the unresolved conflict provided fertile ground for criminal activity. With regard to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, in September, worsening tension erupted in clashes between the conflicting parties in the Kodori Valley. These clashes were narrowly contained. In October, a helicopter transporting UNOMIG staff was shot down, resulting in the death of six UN Observers and staff. Subsequently, UNHCR activities in Abkhazia were suspended for the remainder of 2001. The situation was further complicated in November when IFRC stopped its activities in the health and other sectors.

Funding

As a result of UNHR's global funding shortfall, which resulted in a 20 per cent reduction of the country budget, the implementation of some activities was either reduced (such as the distribution of wood-burning stoves, hygiene materials and firewood), or deferred to 2002 (such as the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure).

Achievements and impact

Protection and Solutions

UNHCR monitored status determination interviews conducted by the authorities and made recommendations as part of its capacity-building activities. In 2001, 35 individuals approached UNHCR's office in Tbilisi for counselling on their legal status. UNHCR worked closely with the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) and other relevant departments on the implementation of and compliance with international instruments and standards concerning refugees, as well as the admission of asylum-seekers to Georgian territory. The question of the issuance of birth certificates to children born to Chechen refugees in Georgia (to avoid statelessness) was also raised with the authorities.

Five capacity-building workshops for key government and NGO partners were organised by UNHCR, and a series of national and sub-regional consultations in May/June between HCR, NGOs

and refugees/IDPs served as a forum to elicit and consider concerns and needs. Local partners also arranged radio and television programmes to improve public knowledge on the rights of refugees and IDPs. Independent researchers completed a study on the legal framework for refugee and IDP children. The study found no shortcomings in the legal framework itself, but identified considerable room for improvement in its implementation. These recommendations will be acted upon in 2002.

Under an agreement between UNHCR and UNICEF, extra-curricular education was organised for 700 IDP children to increase their knowledge of their rights. UNHCR funded and distributed several thousand copies of the interactive children's magazine "White Crane" to schools and orphanages mainly in Gori, Tskhinvali, the Pankisi Valley and western Georgia (including Abkhazia).

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: In the Pankisi Valley, UNHCR helped improve the services provided by the community centre initiated in 2000: a television was installed; a reference library was created; and 150 refugees and young locals participated in English courses, computer and sewing classes. Community development projects (footbridges, reconstruction of riverbanks and a youth centre) were successfully implemented with the participation of the entire population. In western Georgia, counselling and psycho-social support were provided to 730 IDPs. The distribution of seeds, fertiliser and professional kits to 420 vulnerable families ensured improved food security. Ten community projects in the areas of livestock, shelter repair and income-generation were successfully implemented by 4,341 IDPs and 3,541 locals, enhancing their skills and self-reliance. A total of 475 IDP adolescents participated in skills workshops in youth clubs. Educational activities related to human trafficking, reproductive health and domestic violence were supported, to enhance the knowledge of 3,902 IDP women on these subjects.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: Refugees in the Pankisi Valley received some essential items such as firewood, wood stoves, mattresses, and kitchen sets, but in lesser quantities than originally planned due to UNHCR's financial situation.

Education: In the Pankisi Valley, textbooks and school supplies were distributed to 1,775 local and refugee children and to 166 teachers. Some 80 teachers and 1,000 students participated in 13 training sessions on peace building, designed to equip teachers and students with the skills to resolve classroom conflict non-violently and overcome differences through peaceful mediation. In western Georgia, 22 schools in Gali and two in Ochamchira were rehabilitated, giving returnees and local children access to education. A total of 25 IDP schoolchildren participated in a co-funded summer camp in Bulgaria for peace building and psycho-social rehabilitation.

Food: While WFP continued to provide basic food to the 7,882 Chechen refugees, UNHCR gave host families in the Pankisi Valley a one-month food ration to promote smooth relations between Chechen refugees and the local population. Hot meals were also provided to 1,000 vulnerable elderly IDPs.

Forestry: With the support of an NGO, 32 hectares in the Pankisi Valley were replanted by 70 refugees and 150 local people. 100 children participated in ecology field trips as part of the forestry project; the 25 most active children were rewarded with participation in a summer camp. Re-forestation projects in Samegrelo and Imereti, covering an area of 40 hectares, were also completed as planned.

Health/Nutrition: In November, after the successive withdrawal of MSF and IFRC from the Pankisi Valley, UNHCR took over the programme for primary health care and emergency medical referrals. This included remuneration for doctors, arranging and transporting emergency referrals outside the Pankisi Valley, and distribution of medicines (donated by an NGO) to three clinics and one regional hospital. An arrangement was agreed with another partner for 2002.

Income Generation: This sector continued to be very active in 2001 through various activities including individual and group loans, micro credit and income-generation inputs. In Tbilisi, 13,000 individuals (98 per cent women) received micro-finance grants. In western Georgia, a total of 4,552 IDPs and locals received loans, which indirectly benefited as many as 11,880 extended family-

members. Through 10 separate projects, some 4,159 co-operative members were granted access to land and received training to successfully manage duck breeding, livestock, bee-keeping and fishery projects.

Legal Assistance: UNHCR supported the registration activities of the MRA for all groups of concern. The South Ossetian Committee for Migration and Nationalities registered the returnees, facilitated clearance of the few repatriation applications and provided legal consultation to 150 families on property restitution within South Ossetia. Discussions on the draft law on property restitution took place under the aegis of UNHCR, the Council of Europe and OSCE. The Office hired researchers to analyse existing legislation on refugees and children and propose recommendations to address any legal gaps. Radio programmes were produced on the rights and obligations of returnees and IDP women, according to national and international laws.

Livestock: UNHCR distributed piglets to returnee families in South Ossetia and financed a pig farm. The 50 beneficiary families participated in the running of the project. Target numbers could not be reached, however, as many pigs died of a virus.

Operational Support (to Agencies): Local government bodies continued to receive assistance to improve their capacity to manage refugee matters and security. Funds were also made available to local and international implementing NGO partners to cover certain operational expenses. A UNV engineer provided technical expertise for the school rehabilitation programme in Abkhazia. Three UNVs supported various field offices and the Office's programme unit. International implementing partners received reimbursement of five per cent of their headquarters overheads. In December, UNHCR offered programme management training for 30 implementing partner staff.

Sanitation: To prevent an outbreak of hepatitis in the Pankisi Valley, UNHCR supported a one-time waste removal campaign and areas around the villages were disinfected. Sanitation was improved: 200 outdoor latrines were built for the most needy host families. 2,750 refugee women received 5,000 kg of soap, 5,000 packs of sanitary towels, and 2,000 kg of soap powder.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: UNHCR distributed shelter material to 61 vulnerable IDP families.

Transport/Logistics: Warehouses in Akhmeta and Tbilisi enabled the timely delivery of food and household items to the refugees in Pankisi Valley. Construction materials were transported, stored and distributed to returning IDPs and for the rehabilitation of 24 schools in Gali and Ochamchira.

Water: The provision of chlorine to the local water and sanitation departments helped them to guarantee a safe and reliable water distribution network in the Pankisi Valley. Some 15,000 refugees and local people (i.e. more than double the original population of the Valley) benefited from this assistance.

Organisation and Implementation

Management

UNHCR operations in Georgia were carried out through the country office in Tbilisi and field offices in Akhmeta and Gali. A presence was maintained in Zugdidi and Sukhumi (national staff) while a mobile team, working out of Gori, also covered South Ossetia. The programme in Tbilisi was administered by seven international and 21 national staff, while five international and 31 national staff worked out of the other offices. In addition, the Office was supported by one JPO and four UNVs. The operation suffered from delays in filling vacant posts, including those of the Representative and Deputy Representative. Following a review of UNHCR's operations in South Ossetia, the offices in Gori/Tskhinvali were closed at the end of the year. On several occasions field staff had to be called back to Tbilisi for security reasons.

Working with Others

UNHCR continued to support the agencies and diplomatic missions working on the respective conflict-resolution processes and was an active partner in the UN Country Team. A total of 17 implementing partners were associated with UNHCR's 2001 programme.

Overall assessment

UNHCR was able to meet the basic protection and assistance needs of the Chechen refugees in the Pankisi Valley despite the overall tension and several security incidents. In an increasingly complex environment, addressing protection and assistance issues will remain a challenge for UNHCR. In 2001, the office was still unable to propose a permanent solution for this group. Although the conflict-resolution processes on South Ossetia and Abkhazia are completely frozen, UNHCR succeeded in increasing the self-reliance of the IDPs without causing them to relinquish their rights to return to their areas of origin when conditions permit. The security conditions in Georgia worsened during the year and this hampered the smooth implementation of operations.

Offices

Tbilisi
Akhmeta
Gali
Sukhumi
Zugdidi

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation
South Ossetian Committee for Migration and Nationality

NGOs

Acción contra el Hambre
Agency for Social, Economic and Community Development
Agency for Community Motivation and Social Development
Agency for Community Rehabilitation and Social Development
Charity Humanitarian Centre "Abkhazeti"
Constanta
Georgia Young Lawyers Association
International Rescue Committee
Norwegian Refugee Council
Peace and Accord
Samani
Technical Assistance Georgia
United Nations Association of Georgia
Women Aid International (Georgia)

Others

UNV

Financial Report (USD)				
Expenditure Breakdown	Annual Programme Budget		Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets	
	Current Year's Projects	notes	Prior Years' Projects	notes
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,692,840		100,912	
Community Services	408,856		427,487	
Crop Production	0		63,060	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	147,797		(1,094)	
Education	126,691		49,335	
Food	141,266		0	
Forestry	50,978		0	
Health / Nutrition	59,821		37,848	
Income Generation	416,228		155,558	
Legal Assistance	171,263		80,470	
Livestock	15,269		8,603	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	422,832		75,015	
Sanitation	19,541		0	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	39,806		36,540	
Transport / Logistics	125,664		9,725	
Water	15,114		0	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	562,124		(910,562)	
Sub-total Operational	4,416,090		132,897	
Programme Support	1,001,506		12,330	
Sub-total Disbursements / Deliveries	5,417,596	(3)	145,227	(5)
Unliquidated Obligations	246,349	(3)	0	
TOTAL	5,663,945	(1) (3)	145,227	

Instalments with Implementing Partners

Payments Made	2,398,619		11,828	
Reporting Received	1,836,495		922,390	
Balance	562,124		(910,562)	
Outstanding 1st January	0		963,180	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		202,618	
Currency Adjustment	0		0	
Outstanding 31 December	562,124		(150,000)	

Unliquidated Obligations

Outstanding 1st January	0		218,014	(5)
New Obligations	5,663,945	(1)	0	
Disbursements	5,417,596	(3)	145,227	(5)
Cancellations	0		72,787	(5)
Outstanding 31 December	246,349	(3)	0	

Figures which cross reference to Accounts:

- (1) Annex to Statement 1
- (3) Schedule 3
- (5) Schedule 5