

EASTERN EUROPE

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

One of the major developments in the region during the last months of 2001 and beginning of 2002 was the accession of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Following the accession, national legislation on asylum was either introduced or amended to meet international standards. By now, and with the exception of Moldova, all CIS countries have national legislation in place and governmental structures to deal with asylum management.

There has been no return movement of Chechen refugees from Georgia. The re-registration exercise of these refugees in the Pankhisi valley of Georgia revealed that there are less than 4,000 refugees as opposed to the initial figure of 8,000. The conflict over Abkhazia remains unsolved, and the atmosphere is not conducive for the return of 250,000 Georgian IDPs to their homes in Abkhazia. Despite the absence of a breakthrough in the settlement of the conflict, there is a visible but significant spontaneous return of IDPs to the Gali region. It is hoped that the newly appointed Special Representative of the Secretary General may be able to bring the parties to the negotiating table.

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh remains unsolved despite continued international efforts. Finding solutions for the thousands of refugees and IDPs in Armenia and Azerbaijan therefore remains critical.

The conditions under which IDPs from Chechnya are living are of great concern to UNHCR and the international community. Due to the uncertain security, the vast majority of the IDPs in Ingushetia and other surrounding republics are reluctant to return to Chechnya. UNHCR continues to impress

upon the authorities that all returns must be voluntary.

PROGRESS TOWARD OBJECTIVES, AND CONSTRAINTS ENCOUNTERED

As part of internal prioritisation exercises as a result of recurrent funding shortfalls, UNHCR has continued to rightsize and reduce its Eastern Europe operations. In many countries, it revisited its involvement on behalf of IDPs, especially in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, where there appears to be little chance of political settlements in the near future.

Despite the reduction of material assistance, UNHCR continued to lend its expertise to States in the area of asylum and citizenship legislation and placed emphasis on capacity building. Systematic training of government officials, judges, law enforcement officials and the civic society has been conducted. The capacity-building activities for NGOs have targeted UNHCR's implementing and operational partners in the CIS countries with the objective of increasing their sustainable involvement in refugee assistance and protection. The key areas of NGO capacity-building, i.e. their financial sustainability, NGO-mass media co-operation, NGO-government co-operation and NGO's protection role, are covered through learning programmes designed with UNHCR offices in the CIS countries. UNHCR continues its support to the CIS-wide NGO working groups. Within the framework of the CISCONF follow-up, a series of regional and sub-regional expert meetings on migration and asylum issues has been held. UNHCR has also facilitated meetings and training events to strengthen cross-border co-operation of border-guards and to build up their capacity in handling asylum requests at border points, together

with the EU and the Swedish Migration Board.

Regional strategies for mainstreaming activities in support of refugee women and children into country plans and for ensuring implementation have included training-of-trainers sessions for staff of national institutions and NGOs.

ACTIVITIES UNTIL 30 JUNE 2002

In **Armenia**, UNHCR provided comments to the Amendments to the Law on Refugees, which has been adopted by the National Assembly, introducing a complementary form of protection or “temporary asylum”. The amendments also sought to give a type of formal status to the group of mostly ethnic Armenians displaced from Abkhazia (Georgia) and Chechnya (Russian Federation). In the area of capacity-building, border guards and the judiciary were included in the training sessions organised by UNHCR in collaboration with IOM and the Council of Europe. To support national structures for the effective provision of citizenship to 260,000 refugees from Azerbaijan, amendments have been made in the Law on Citizenship whereby the period of granting Armenian citizenship to refugees from Azerbaijan in a facilitated manner was extended by two years. UNHCR continued to extend material support to the 30 district and sub-district centres processing applications for citizenship countrywide. UNHCR continued to advocate and create linkages for inclusion of the needs of refugees in national, bi-lateral and multi-lateral development plans, including the national Poverty Reduction Strategy.

In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR continued to provide on-the-job coaching and training to the refugee status determination team of the State Committee for Refugees, which has been jointly selected by UNHCR and the Government. UNHCR has contributed to the setting up of a network of NGO lawyers with a sound knowledge of domestic law on refugees, RSD procedures and asylum-seekers’ and refugees’ rights. It is expected

that this network will be operational at the end of the year.

The Office continued to work with development agencies to promote self-reliance for 550,000 IDPs who are not yet able to return to their homes. UNHCR is also trying to mainstream humanitarian interventions into the national poverty alleviation and economic recovery programmes. To this end, UNHCR collaborated with the World Bank in drafting the questionnaire for the Poverty Assessment Survey and will be participating in the analysis of the results of the survey. In the context of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy, UNHCR, together with national NGO partners, carried out a small research project to look at the barriers and solutions to urban IDPs employment.

Due to the increase in the number of refugees from Chechnya, the budget for the country programme was increased.

Belarus acceded to the 1951 Convention in 2001 and the Government began work on amending the existing legislation to bring it fully into compliance with the international standards, and invited UNHCR to assist in the process. A revised version of the Law on Refugees was submitted in April to the national legislature and was approved in its first reading. The growth in the number of recognised refugees in Belarus continued though at a slower pace because of a restructuring of the Government and personnel among the officials that UNHCR had been working with and, in view of the changing situation in Afghanistan, a perceptible reluctance on the part of the authorities to consider asylum applications from Afghans. By June, the total had reached 625, the majority of the successful applicants continuing to be from outside the CIS.

UNHCR in Belarus continued to focus its efforts on building the capacity of relevant official and non-governmental structures through targeted technical assistance and training as well as on raising public

awareness of refugee issues. It continued work on helping to further refine the refugee legislation and its practical implementation, and to facilitate durable solutions for recognised refugees, with local integration being a priority. In May, the country's first Temporary Accommodation Center, established with the financial support of UNHCR, was opened in the eastern city of Vitebsk; it provides places for around 30 vulnerable asylum-seekers. UNHCR also continued to promote cross-border regional co-operation in the areas of refugees and migration in the four-country "Soderkoping process" and co-organised seminars for migration service and border guard officials from Belarus, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, (with observers also participating from Latvia and Moldova) in Vilnius, Lithuania, in April and Kyiv, Ukraine, in May.

In **Moldova**, the Government remained committed to the asylum issue and the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 York Protocol entered into force respectively on 1 May and 31 January 2002. A two-day high level post-accession working visit to UNHCR HQ was organised jointly with Ukraine and Belarus aiming to explore best means of co-operation to have the Convention fully and effectively implemented. The Directorate for Refugees is in the process of training new staff (recently expanded from 7 to 18, with a plan to have 25 staff by the end of the year) and has laid the foundations for regular bi-lateral relations with similar but more advanced structures (notably in Belarus, Czech and Slovak Republics, Romania and Ukraine). Its staff has also continued to observe UNHCR's work with a view to a hand-over in all relevant spheres, i.e. refugee status determination, local integration, social assistance, income generation, etc. UNHCR organised seminars on refugee/asylum-related issues with focus on implementation of the 1951 Geneva Convention for Parliamentarians, senior officials, prosecutors, border guards and judges. UNHCR also continued to provide key Ministries (Justice, Foreign Affairs and Interior), the Border Guard Department, the Chisinau Municipality and several NGOs with technical assistance

and equipment to strengthen their management capacities.

Pending the creation of appropriate Government structures that would process asylum claims, UNHCR continued to exercise its Mandate and provided basic protection and assistance to *bona-fide* asylum-seekers and refugees.

On 10 January 2002, **Ukraine** acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol without any reservations. On 4 April its accession to the Protocol and on 10 June to the Convention were deposited with the UN Secretary General. After last year's adoption of a new Refugee Law, already mostly in line with the Convention and Protocol, these accessions brought long term UNHCR lobbying efforts to fruition.

The Office in Kyiv continued its close co-operation with and support to the Citizenship Department of the Presidential Administration and other relevant governmental and non-governmental partners with a view to promoting the naturalisation of refugees and accession of Ukraine to the two UN conventions on statelessness.

The network of NGOs providing legal assistance expanded and strengthened. This network now provides counselling on refugee status determination and other legal issues as well as legal representation of asylum-seekers and refugees in 17 of the 27 regions of Ukraine. Some 80 law students attended the refugee law courses that were established last year at four major universities (Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv and Odessa). Advanced students, organised in associated Legal Clinics, assisted UNHCR, NGOs and lawyers in providing legal services to asylum-seekers and refugees.

OUTLOOK FOR JULY - DECEMBER 2002

UNHCR will continue facilitating the proper implementation of national legislation related to refugees and asylum-seekers to ensure a smooth hand-over of refugee status

determination procedures to newly created national bodies. Together with partner agencies, UNHCR is planning to organise a High Level Review Meeting of the CISCONF follow-up, possibly in November 2002.

The overall funding situation of the Office has necessitated the reduction of spending authority. While in the first semester this

was limited to administrative expenditures, in the second semester it may also affect operational activities. Although the overall objectives for the region remain unchanged, the targets for individual activities will in some cases need to be reduced to remain within the funds available. This could impact on UNHCR's ability to maintain standards of protection and assistance as well as the search for durable solutions.

Financial Data (USD)

Country / Activity	Annual Programme Budget			
	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level
Armenia	2,557,652	2,563,352	1,684,397	1,272,500
Azerbaijan	2,732,934	3,242,934	1,826,380	1,826,380
Belarus	779,616	790,618	385,300	385,300
Georgia	5,365,825	5,393,047	2,947,071	2,348,320
Republic of Moldova	1,045,708	1,034,503	475,710	475,710
Russian Federation	15,545,509	15,350,310	8,777,126	6,299,270
Ukraine	2,136,053	2,140,167	1,182,956	1,092,350
Regional Activities ¹	665,000	665,000	188,480	188,480
Total	30,828,297	31,179,931	17,467,420	13,888,310

¹Includes the follow-up to the Geneva conference on the problem of refugees, deported people, migration and asylum issues, as well as scholarships for refugee students.