

COUNTRY OPERATION

ARMENIA

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Promote the naturalisation and local integration of refugees of Armenian ethnic origin; facilitate implementation of the Citizenship Law and the conventions on statelessness; promote the principles of the 1951 Convention; increase the Government's capacity to manage integration, naturalisation, protection and assistance; promote co-operation between local NGOs and relevant government institutions by helping them gain expertise and function more autonomously.

Persons of Concern

MAIN REFUGEE ORIGIN/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Ethnic Armenians (Refugees)	296,200	50,000	54	10.5
Asylum seekers	10	-	20	-



Impact

- 50,000 refugees, most of them vulnerable, received assistance: improved shelter, clean water, health services, primary education, and limited credit facilities.
- Naturalisation procedures were accelerated by adopting decentralised government structures and simplified application forms.
- Some 50,000 refugees were informed of naturalisation procedures and about 7,500 acquired citizenship.
- The national Refugee Law was passed; 15 training sessions on the Refugee Law were conducted for officials, NGOs and the media.



- National structures took on greater responsibilities vis-à-vis refugees and asylum-seekers as a result of training and operational support provided by UNHCR.

Income and Expenditure - SP Activities (USD)

WORKING BUDGET	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS*	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
3,793,482	1,802,254	1,010,926	2,813,180	2,692,956

* Includes contributions earmarked for the Special Programme in the CIS countries.

** Includes opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

As a result of inter-ethnic tension and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, there was a massive displacement of population in the late 1980s. Some 300,000 ethnic Armenians, mainly from Azerbaijan, are currently registered as refugees in Armenia, though as many as one third of this number may have left the country for economic reasons.

UNHCR has worked in Armenia since the end of 1992 to assist the Government to address the human dimensions of the conflict. The solution pursued on behalf of refugees from Azerbaijan included permanent local integration and naturalisation, as it is unlikely that they will return to their country of origin.

In view of the limited resources available to it, UNHCR has concentrated efforts on the most vulnerable refugees, and on building up the capacity of state institutions. By working closely with these institutions, UNHCR has encouraged them to expand their responsibilities and begin to effectively manage the integration and naturalisation processes, as well as the provision of protection and various legal functions. In 1998-1999, UNHCR assisted the government in implementing the national Citizenship Law of 1995. Despite initial hesitation on the part of refugees to consider naturalisation, the number of naturalised refugees rose considerably in 1999 as a result of an information campaign and improved procedures. Naturalisation also remains the key to reduce statelessness among refugees and fits in with Armenia's international obligations as party to the conventions on statelessness. A national Refugee Law was passed in March 1999 with UNHCR's assistance. Training continued, in parallel with other activities related to its implementation.

Over the past years, the international community has tried to broker a solution to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1999, positive developments included new initiatives by the OSCE Minsk Group and personal contacts between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the assassination in October of leading politicians in Armenia reduced that momentum.

Constraints

Some 50 per cent of the population, refugees included, lives below the poverty line. Many refugees are hesi-

tant to become citizens for fear of losing humanitarian assistance and other perceived privileges. The political uncertainty that prevailed prior to the parliamentary elections in May 1999 affected the management and efficiency of government offices. This slowed the implementation of certain activities planned for early in the year, and impeded the distribution of refurbished housing, the selection of new project sites, and training activities. These constraints largely disappeared after the new government was formed.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

The adoption of the 1995 Citizenship Law and the simplification of procedures for acquiring citizenship set in motion the *de jure* integration of ethnic-Armenian refugees. The number of applications for citizenship increased after an information campaign that was actively supported by UNHCR. As a result of these and other efforts to avoid or reduce statelessness, it is likely that the vast majority of refugees will eventually opt for citizenship. However, ensuring the refugees' economic independence (60 per cent still require basic assistance) and social integration will remain a significant challenge and require the active involvement of development-oriented partners.

Only a handful of non-Armenian asylum-seekers applied for refugee status (only one applicant obtained refugee status). A national Refugee Law, to which UNHCR contributed substantially with advice and written comments, was passed in March. Its implementation by the authorities will require further training and other support from UNHCR.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: Asylum-seekers and refugees received counselling when in need of psychological support, medical care or social support. After training of key government staff and social workers in its use, UNHCR handed the task over to the Department for Migration and Refugees, and to the Social Protection Department established in the offices of the provincial Governors. UNHCR encouraged the active participation of refugee communities in identifying and prioritising the needs of refugees, particularly those of the most vulnerable: the disabled, elderly people, single mothers and children who account for more than 60 per cent of those receiving assistance. Some 5,000 vulnerable elderly refugees in communal centres in

Yerevan received basic physical, psychological and medical care. For children and adolescents, UNHCR helped organise regional summer camps, peace and tolerance education, and a regional magazine.

Education: UNHCR supported educational projects consistent with the national policy of educational reform. This policy is predicated on schools managed by the community (the Parent-School Partnership). In remote villages with a high proportion of refugees, 18 primary schools were helped to set up and run Parent-School Partnerships. UNHCR and UNDP also co-funded the repair and refurbishment of four schools in border areas. In schools, attendance and the quality of education improved.

Forestry: Due to the energy embargo and harsh winter conditions, the population often resorted to felling trees for fuel. UNHCR implemented several community-based tree planting and irrigation projects, through WFP Food-for-Work projects, to mitigate the environmental damage in priority locations.

Health/Nutrition: In partnership with NGOs and in co-operation with UNDP and the Ministry of Health, UNHCR continued to work within the framework of the national policy for Primary Health Care. A Village Health and Revolving Drugs Scheme was established to service a chain of 20 villages and settlements with a high proportion of refugees. Through this scheme, health posts provided refugees and local inhabitants with emergency services, primary and reproductive health care, and education on hygiene. Experience suggested that the commitment of the population is sufficient to ensure continued self-financing and the revolving character of the drugs scheme without outside support.

Income Generation: UNHCR linked micro-credit and income-generating activities to similar projects co-funded by major international NGOs. A review was conducted to determine the impact of these activities, and the constraints upon them, in order to determine future plans for the sector. Since its inception in 1998, more than 5,000 loans have been extended to refugee and local, low-income families. More than 50 per cent of the direct beneficiaries have been women.

Legal Assistance: After the adoption of the national Refugee Law in March 1999, UNHCR assisted the authorities in drafting procedures for the determination of refugee status and other regulations key to

implementation on the country of origin. UNHCR disseminated information on the country of origin, provided general legal advice, and prepared a pamphlet on the Convention Travel Document. UNHCR supported the Government to simplify procedures for naturalisation. Structures for processing applications were further decentralised and integrated into the regional administrative structure. By end of the year, 20 regional and district centres offered services and information on naturalisation to refugees. UNHCR covered some of the costs incurred by applicants for naturalisation in compiling and submitting their files to the authorities. Some 50,000 refugees were informed through the media, pamphlets, and meetings about access to, and the consequences of, naturalisation. About 7,500 refugees acquired Armenian citizenship in 1999.

Operational Support (to Agencies): In addition to supporting the State Department for Migration and Refugees, 20 offices in the regions received training and essential office equipment. Implementing partners were given technical and managerial guidance, as well as financial assistance to cover some costs directly related to the implementation of UNHCR's programme.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: UNHCR's dialogue with the Government stressed the need to alleviate refugees' severe housing problems. The Government made available to UNHCR several unfinished public buildings, for transformation into permanent housing for 360 refugees. Efforts were redoubled to improve the living conditions of refugees residing in communal centres and temporary dwellings. For the second year, the Government budgeted USD 700,000 for the rehabilitation and privatisation of communal centres. UNHCR and WFP pooled resources and co-funded Food-for-Work projects to encourage community participation in improving the environment and basic infrastructure in areas populated by refugees. The scheme was successfully implemented in more than 200 sites, benefiting some 15,000 refugees and local inhabitants.

Transport/Logistics: A donation of quilts, used clothing and school kits, was distributed to about 40,000 needy refugees and nationals.

Water: In view of the lack of safe drinking water in rural areas, UNHCR approached the Government and the World Bank to urge them to join UNHCR in improving access to clean water. As a result, USD 250,000 was

channelled to the Social Investment Fund (funded by the Government and the World Bank), to rehabilitate the water supply in nine villages, benefiting some 28,000 refugees and local inhabitants. The selection of sites was based on need, the willingness of the refugee community to acquire citizenship, the degree of community participation (both nationals and refugees) and the likelihood of sustainability. The scheme not only helped to improve water supplies and sanitation, but also enhanced the integration of refugees into local communities.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

The number of international staff was reduced from six to four, supported by one JPO and 19 national staff. The Office received technical support from a Swiss shelter expert based in Tbilisi and from UNHCR's Regional Health Consultant in Baku. The Office also drew upon the expertise of regional technical advisors in the various UNHCR offices in the region.

Working with Others

In March, UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Security signed a Memorandum of Understanding, providing a framework for co-operation between UNHCR and the Government. In November, the Department for Migration and Refugees acquired independent status as a separate entity, reporting directly to the Prime Minister. This eased speedier implementation of joint projects.

UNHCR worked closely with IOM and OSCE, and sought to strengthen co-operation with other UN agencies, NGOs and development organisations to address outstanding social needs. A Memorandum of Understanding was concluded with UNDP for joint planning and co-funding of a number of activities. UNHCR and WFP agreed to co-fund Food-for-Work projects. Joint planning with UNICEF led to support for several activities. UNHCR expanded contacts with the Government's Social Investment Fund and the World Bank.

Within the framework of PARinAC and the follow-up to the CIS Conference, special attention was paid to developing viable NGOs. Four local NGOs were selected to become longer-term partners. The Armenian Assembly of America's NGO Training Centre and UNHCR implemented a three-year programme to build up 14 fledgling national NGOs.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Maximum use was made of the limited financial resources available for the UNHCR programme in Armenia, by joining forces with other partners and integrating assistance to refugees, to the extent possible, into national structures and programmes. Although the naturalisation campaign proved to be effective, a truly durable solution to the refugees' situation is predicated on a smooth and effective transition from humanitarian assistance to longer-term development programmes.

Office

Yerevan

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Social Security, Government Office,
Department for Migration and Refugees
Ministry of Interior, Department for Visa and Passports

NGOs

Bridge of Hope
Catholic Relief Services
Future Generation
Mission Armenia
National Centre for Democracy and Human Rights
NGO Training and Resource Centre
Norwegian Refugee Council
OXFAM
The Young Men's Association
United Methodist Committee on Relief

Other

International Organisation Migration
United Nations Children's Fund
United Nations Development Programme
World Food Programme

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects			Prior Years' Projects		
	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	169,252	493,447	662,699	1,152	5,388	6,540
Community Services	11,457	78,880	90,337	10,200	54,244	64,444
Education	0	95,164	95,164	3,000	15,388	18,388
Forestry	0	30,000	30,000	0	0	0
Health / Nutrition	0	73,915	73,915	0	63,680	63,680
Income Generation	0	112,529	112,529	0	51,698	51,698
Legal Assistance	57,542	12,675	70,218	48,044	7,163	55,207
Operational Support (to Agencies)	23,522	67,723	91,245	43,994	26,589	70,583
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	0	226,751	226,751	0	190,052	190,052
Transport / Logistics	0	10,825	10,825	0	(9,205)	(9,205)
Water	0	62,023	62,023	0	88,931	88,931
Instalments with Implementing Partners	18,002	753,516	771,518	(83,795)	(466,742)	(550,538)
Sub - total Operational	279,775	2,017,449	2,297,225	22,595	27,186	49,781
Administrative Support	0	93,656	93,656	0	0	0
Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries	279,775	2,111,105	2,390,881	22,595	27,186	49,781
Unliquidated Obligations	41,407	581,850	623,257	0	0	0
TOTAL	321,182	2,692,956	3,014,138	22,595	27,186	49,781
Instalments with Implementing Partners						
Payments Made	75,858	1,454,597	1,530,455	16,000	21,798	37,798
Reporting Received	57,856	701,081	758,937	99,795	488,540	588,336
Balance	18,002	753,516	771,518	(83,795)	(466,742)	(550,538)
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	88,392	504,318	592,710
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	0	4,596	37,543	42,139
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0	0	(33)	(33)
Outstanding 31 December	18,002	753,516	771,518	0	0	0
Unliquidated Obligations						
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	57,198	187,927	245,125
New Obligations	321,182	2,692,956	3,014,138	0	0	0
Disbursements	279,775	2,111,105	2,390,881	22,595	27,186	49,781
Cancellations	0	0	0	34,603	160,741	195,344
Outstanding 31 December	41,407	581,850	623,257	0	0	0

