

# ARMENIA

## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Promote the integration of 300,000 ethnic Armenian refugees through naturalisation and multi-sectoral assistance.
- Provide protection and assistance to other asylum-seekers and refugees.
- Assist in strengthening the capacity of central and regional Government authorities and NGOs to address refugee issues

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

In January, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between UNHCR and the Ministry of Territorial Governance to reaffirm the framework for co-operation between UNHCR and the Government. The MOU describes joint efforts to decentralise and facilitate procedures for acquiring citizenship; to integrate assistance to refugees into national public structures; to adopt legislation to encourage refugees to become naturalised citizens; to implement the Refugee Law and related refugee status determination procedures; and to promote increased responsibility of national institutions to provide assistance and protection to refugees and asylum-seekers.

An information campaign is being conducted to inform and encourage the ethnic Armenian refugees to opt for naturalisation. The campaign includes the organisation of seminars and round-table discussions for government officials and NGOs, as well as refugees. Since 1999, a monthly radio programme is being aired. In each of Armenia's eleven regions, the Social Protection Departments have been equipped to assist refugees to apply for Armenian citizenship. UNHCR continued its campaign in the regions on the possibilities for easier access to Armenian citizenship, as well as on the rights and responsibilities attached to

the acquisition of citizenship. A monthly bulletin has also been launched to better inform refugees about their rights and to dispel misconceptions about naturalisation. During the first six months of the year 4,640 refugees were naturalised, bring the total since the start of the campaign and the simplified naturalisation procedures to 16,640.

Many refugees remain hesitant to apply for citizenship due to the very difficult economic situation in the country and perceived privileges attached to refugee status. UNHCR assisted the Department of Migration and Refugees (DMR) to develop legislation encouraging refugees to apply for citizenship, for instance by transferring to refugees the ownership of state-owned housing. In April, the National Assembly passed a law allowing refugees to participate in local government elections. In May, local authorities started to issue new ID cards and Convention Travel Documents to ethnic Armenian refugees. UNHCR supports this process through financial assistance to national structures and by providing legal advice and logistical support.

Special assistance to the most vulnerable refugees is still necessary. While UNHCR's humanitarian assistance projects are being gradually phased down, the Office is seeking to link its programmes to those of national and other agencies facilitating the integration of refugees and fostering harmony between refugee and local communities.

In the area of UNHCR-Government co-operation to meet shelter needs, the Government made available several uncompleted or dilapidated public buildings for rehabilitation and remodelling into permanent housing for refugees. The initial objective for 2000 was to provide shelter for 600 refugee families currently living in hazardous and sub-standard dwellings. Owing to funding constraints, the objective was revised to benefit 300 families. In the first six months of the year, 60 apartments

were being remodelled in Yerevan, 43 in Artashat, 45 in Byureghavan and 23 in Ijevan. Construction in three other sites will commence after the completion of technical assessments. A shelter consultant provided by the Swiss Government is assisting UNHCR in the programme.

UNHCR and WFP are currently jointly co-funding a food-for-work scheme (FFW), which aims to ensure community participation in improving the environment and basic infrastructure, as well as increasing family income. Since the beginning of the year, FFW activities have been initiated in 120 sites and feasibility studies of further sites have been made. Some 20,000 beneficiaries, including refugees and members of local communities, will be supported through this project.

In an effort to address refugee needs through national programmes, UNHCR, the Government and the World Bank are collaborating through the Armenian Social Investment Fund. The World Bank and the Government allocated some USD 10 million for national programmes to rehabilitate social infrastructure and to build civil society through community participation in the management of projects selected for support. UNHCR is contributing USD 300,000 to this programme. Technical assessments and construction work to rehabilitate eight water systems and seven schools in 15 refugee-populated communities has commenced. As a result, 18,385 needy people, of whom 46 per cent are refugees, will have access to safe potable and irrigation water and education.

The plan to transfer 15 health posts and the Revolving Drug Funds in 18 villages to the respective communities is being implemented through training in leadership, in village health insurance initiatives and in management of the Funds. The integration of health services for refugees into the local structures will allow UNHCR to phase out its direct involvement in the sector by the end of the year.

Over the past two years, UNHCR and international NGOs have been co-funding economic

self-reliance activities. A micro-credit scheme, targeting low-income beneficiaries, including refugees, operates through revolving credit and group guarantees, tied-employment loans and skills training. Currently, some 5,000 low-income households have access to credit services. Due to budget reductions, only 150 additional households could be included instead of the 1,000 initially planned. UNHCR is preparing to hand over the management of this activity to an international NGO working in close co-operation with a credit union.

Physical, psychological and medical care is being provided to some 5,000 incapacitated and lonely elderly refugees in 158 communal centres in Yerevan. Due to the growing urgent needs, the programme has been extended to elderly refugees living in 18 communal centres in the regions. Some 8,000 individual refugees benefited from social and legal counselling provided by NGOs assisted by UNHCR. Psychosocial adaptation activities, educational programmes for children and youth-at-risk, as well as advocacy for the protection of children's rights are also being pursued.

UNHCR continues to co-operate closely with national NGOs in the framework of the Partnership in Action (PARinAC) process and the follow up to the CIS Conference. Special efforts have been made to develop NGO capacity to assist in promoting international principles and national laws for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. Round-table discussions, six workshops in Armenia and five outside the country were held, benefiting some 300 persons. Through the NGO Resource Centre, UNHCR supports six local NGOs with small grants and intensive field training. Representatives of six national NGOs were assisted to participate in the annual meeting in Geneva of the CIS Conference Steering Committee.

A number of constraints have limited the impact of UNHCR's programme in Armenia. Staff and organisational changes in the Government affected the management and implementation of certain government-related activities, reducing the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives. The delay in approval of a

World Bank loan to the Government affected the initial schedule for implementation of the UNHCR/Government/WB activities for the rehabilitation of social infrastructure. UNHCR's funding situation required a review of priorities and the reduction of the beneficiary targets. A further reduction of the budget would force UNHCR to accelerate the phasing down and handing over of activities. It may also have an impact on UNHCR's ability to motivate the Government and local population to maintain positive policies and attitudes towards non-ethnic Armenian asylum-seekers and refugees. While NGOs have grown in number and capacity, they remain highly dependent on external guidance and funding. Budget reductions would slow down or jeopardise progress already achieved.

The Refugee Law adopted in March 1999 is generally in line with international standards, although some articles may need revision. UNHCR continues to promote the application of procedures for the determination of refugee status. In March, two additional asylum-seekers from outside the CIS region were recognised by the Government. In February, the Government, in line with its obligations under the 1951 Convention, adopted a decree to provide asylum-seekers with temporary housing, free translation, legal services and medical assistance, as well as a one-time financial grant. During the reporting period, draft legislation on procedures for the determination of refugee status was finalised by UNHCR and DMR, and forwarded to the Government for adoption.

UNHCR drafted and published three training manuals in Armenian: *Refugee Status Determination Procedures*, *International Protection of Refugees and National Legislation in Armenia*, and *Permanent Solution for Refugees in Armenia*.

### REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

The initial overall objectives remain valid. Priority activities will include the following.

In relation to the first objective, UNHCR and the Government will redouble efforts to promote easy access to citizenship procedures, as well as to disseminate information through the mass media and through direct contacts with refugees. UNHCR will continue to provide basic assistance to the most vulnerable refugees, but will also seek increased involvement of national and other developmental organisations. UNHCR will also continue its efforts to assist the Government to develop an efficient central governmental structure responsible for the implementation of the Refugee Law, as well as for the co-ordination of the naturalisation campaign and the integration of refugees.

In relation to the third objective, emphasis will be placed on ensuring the implementation of the Refugee Law and the 1951 Convention, and on procedures for the determination of refugee status. Local NGOs will be involved in legal advice, counselling and advocacy activities.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	3,875,690	3,683,065	1,515,348	1,314,700

\*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.