

# AZERBAIJAN

## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

### Ethnic Azeri and Meskhetian Refugees

- Provide multi-sectoral assistance to promote the local integration of some 220,000 ethnic Azeri and Meskhetian refugees and implement a gradual hand-over of these activities to development-oriented national entities and international organisations.

### IDPs

- Provide multi-sectoral assistance to some 540,000 ethnic Azeri internally displaced persons (IDPs) displaced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, to promote their temporary local integration.
- Assist IDPs to return to accessible but war-damaged areas of the country, and to reintegrate.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Government and national NGOs to respond to displacement of populations and to assist persons of concern to UNHCR.
- Implement a gradual hand-over of UNHCR's assistance programme to development-oriented national entities and international organizations.

### Refugees Originating from Outside the CIS region

- Strengthen the Government's capacity to respond to requests for asylum.
- Provide protection and material support to 350 refugees from outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

### Ethnic Azeri and Meskhetian Refugees

Owing to initial financial constraints and the need to prioritise the use of limited resources,

UNHCR has given only very limited assistance to ethnic Azeri and Meskhetian refugees this year. Ethnic Azeri refugees have integrated well in the urban areas of Azerbaijan (mainly Baku and Sumgait) and generally no longer receive assistance from UNHCR.

The new Law on Citizenship, which in principle would allow Meskhetian refugees and some refugees from outside the CIS to obtain Azeri citizenship, is still not being implemented in a comprehensive way. Legal advice and civic education are being provided to raise awareness of refugee rights under the new law, and the importance of acquiring the documentation required for naturalisation. Though official statistics are not available, it is anticipated that most members of the target population will have obtained or will be in the process of obtaining citizenship by the end of 2000. Some vulnerable groups among the Meskhetians are assisted through income-generation activities, agricultural training and the provision of basic health services.

### IDPs

A review of the World Bank/UNHCR/UNDP shelter rehabilitation programme, implemented in 1998-1999, for displaced persons returning to war-damaged areas in Fizuli, Terter and Agdam, concluded that the security situation and fragile economy marked to limit returns to these areas. UNHCR has therefore concentrated its efforts on IDPs in new settlements who have no immediate prospects for return.

Efforts to gather support from the private sector (notably oil companies) in Azerbaijan led to some positive results. ENI Group/AGIP agreed to finance an integrated settlement project for some 400 IDP families in Khanlar and Beylagan in western Azerbaijan. In a first phase, the construction of 50 housing units was completed and a further 100 units have been started. The target for 2000 is 300 units.

The project also aims to improve access to potable water of some 13,000 IDPs living in difficult conditions in the "Lachin winter grounds" in central Azerbaijan. Technical assessments have been conducted there and construction of a water distribution system has started. Preparations for digging some 20 wells are in progress. Activities in micro-credit, training, education and sanitation in the project area will start later in the year.

In the health sector, the hand-over of reproductive health (RH) activities from UNHCR to UNFPA progressed as planned. Efforts to strengthen the capacity of national NGOs to engage in RH and primary health care activities have been intensified, through training and coaching of NGO personnel, and the launch of education programmes for the target population. The health conditions of IDPs are being improved through small grants to support four NGOs carrying out activities such as a national campaign against influenza, and dental prevention through the use of visual aids. An initiative has been launched to establish a new health information system, collecting baseline data on the RH and primary health care needs of the IDP population.

In October 1999, the World Bank gave a USD 10 million loan to Azerbaijan for the establishment of the Social Fund for the Development of Internally Displaced Persons (SFDI). The Fund's objective is to raise the living standards of IDP communities by providing funding for the rehabilitation of small-scale social infrastructure, job creation for IDPs and income-generating activities. The establishment of the Fund is an important factor in the Government's new approach to IDPs. The Board of Directors of the SFDI is composed of representatives of UNHCR, UNDP, WB, USAID and six members representing the relevant ministries, an NGO forum and the private sector. UNHCR and UNDP have agreed to provide institutional and capacity-building support to the Government to establish an interim executive office for the Fund.

The joint efforts of UNHCR and UNDP to

strengthen the capacity of national NGOs continued. Training sessions in basic project management skills are being organised. The NGOs are then supported to implement small assistance projects for IDPs. Currently, 143 project proposals are being reviewed.

#### **Refugees Originating from Outside the CIS Region**

UNHCR continued to interview asylum-seekers, who mainly originate from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and, more recently, from Chechnya. The number of new asylum-seekers increased markedly during the reporting period (779 new applications during the first 6 months of 2000 compared to 266 during all of 1999). Some 100 refugee and asylum-seeker families were provided financial assistance and 69 received medical assistance. A total of 127 persons were submitted for resettlement. Of these, 53 were accepted during the reporting period.

Long-staying Afghan refugees face serious difficulties in regularising their status and making a living in Azerbaijan. UNHCR launched a local integration pilot project to be implemented in the second half of the year for recognised refugees who have the possibility to become naturalised citizens in Azerbaijan under the new citizenship law. The beneficiary families will receive legal, social and economic counselling that will help them to achieve self-sufficiency.

Asylum-seekers and refugees from outside the CIS region do not have access to public medical services. The number of patients requiring consultation and treatment increased tenfold in the past year, and this necessitated a more systematic approach to address the issue. As of 1 January 2000, UNHCR engaged partners to run a clinic for refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR has continued to promote the adoption of a fair and efficient procedure for determining refugee status. In February, UNHCR held a two-day workshop for representatives of relevant ministries and of the Presidential Office, to improve understanding of the issues involved. However, the expected follow-up to the workshops remains pending and a refugee

status determination procedure has still not been adopted.

In March, UNHCR and the Council of Europe jointly organised a working session on the draft law on NGOs. This was followed by further discussions and contacts in which the relevant Azerbaijani authorities and a representative of the NGO Forum participated. On 13 June the draft law on NGOs went through a third reading in Parliament and the law is expected to be adopted shortly.

Budget cuts, which reached 15 per cent during the first six months, necessitated an adjustment in this year's objectives and the cancellation of the planned construction of 200 shelters in new settlements. Fortunately, the contribution from ENI Group/AGIP allowed shelter construction to be maintained in two sites, and resources received from other donors were directed towards planned activities in health, community development, income-generation, education and youth activities. Budget restrictions also forced UNHCR to shelve the planned rehabilitation of a building for asylum-seekers and refugees, and to accelerate the pace of handing over activities to development-oriented agencies. This did not necessarily contribute to a smooth or effective transition and will affect durable solutions for needy refugees and IDPs.

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

The initial objectives and activities remain the same with the following adjustments:

#### Ethnic Azeri and Meskhetian Refugees

- Give priority to improving self-sufficiency and raising awareness on citizenship issues

amongst Meskhetians. If progress is achieved as planned, phase out assistance to this group by the end of the year.

#### IDPs

Instead of focusing on a new return programme to war-damaged areas, UNHCR's objectives now aim to:

- Provide self-sustainable settlements for a limited number of those IDPs who are unlikely to be able to return to their home villages any time soon.
- Consolidate efforts in health, income-generation and community development, with a view to further handing over these activities to more development-oriented organisations.

#### Refugees Originating from Outside the CIS Region

- Once the refugee status determination procedure is adopted, shift the focus to supporting the development of governmental structures responsible for its implementation. Plans include training relevant government officials, and other authorities, such as border guards.
- Prepare comments on the new law on NGOs. Training will be organised for both the authorities in various parts of the administration responsible for implementation of the law, and for national NGOs, in order to raise awareness of their rights and obligations as defined under the new law.
- Give more emphasis to assisting the Government to implement the law on citizenship and naturalisation of eligible refugees, in particular Meskhetians and Afghans.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	4,676,373	5,173,417	2,776,000	2,776,000

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