



Eastern Europe

Operational highlights

- UNHCR assisted the Government of Georgia in developing a national strategy for internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Close to 159,000 IDPs in the Northern Caucasus (Russian Federation) benefited from UNHCR's protection and shelter activities.
- UNHCR met the protection and assistance needs of close to 4,000 Chechen refugees in Azerbaijan and Georgia.
- UNHCR continued to provide training, support and technical advice to the Governments of Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in order to improve their national asylum systems.
- UNHCR supported the Government of Armenia in carrying out a census of the ethnic Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan. While the census is not yet complete, the preliminary findings showed that many refugees had naturalized thus demonstrating the success in finding durable solutions for this group.

Armenia

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Georgia

Republic of Moldova

Russian Federation

Ukraine

Working environment

Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have undergone significant political, socio-economic and institutional reforms in 2006. In the field of migration and asylum, this reform process has resulted in institutional restructuring, which was not completed by the end of the year. The allocation of government resources in support of the asylum system remained insufficient. The geopolitical situation of the three



countries, which are located along the European Union's (EU) external borders, has triggered a complex situation of mixed migration flows from and through their territories. The conflict over Transdniestria remained unresolved.

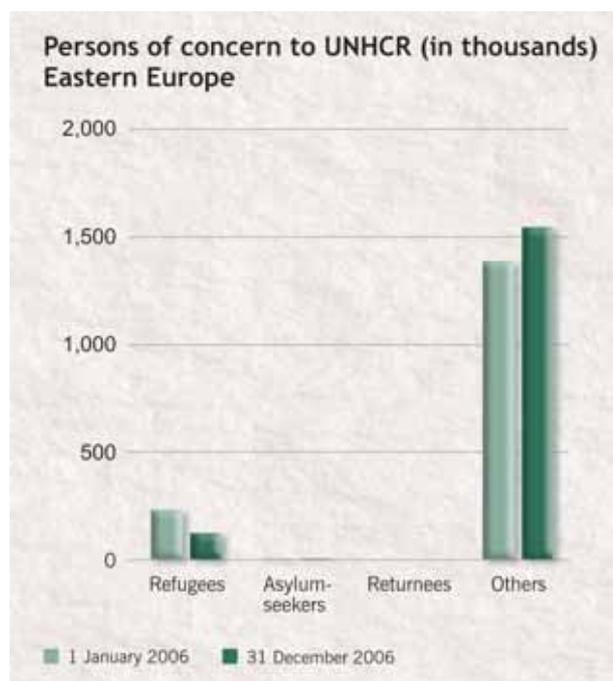
The improvement in the security situation in Eastern Europe led the United Nations to lower its security phase in Chechnya. UNHCR's presence in Grozny is expected to follow suit. The unresolved situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia remained of concern in 2006, as did the unresolved issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. In the wake of the Lebanon crisis, over 500 ethnic Armenians from the Middle East sought refuge in Armenia in 2006. In Azerbaijan, the economic growth rate continued to accelerate with increased state resources being allocated to improve the living conditions of IDPs.

Achievements and impact

In Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, progress in the legislative field led to a better reflection of international standards on refugee protection in the draft national refugee legislation. UNHCR continued its efforts to ensure that all amendments are in line with international standards. Border monitoring was strengthened to ensure access to the territory and to asylum procedures. Resettlement remained the principal durable solution for refugees in these three countries. A regional public information strategy contributed to a better understanding of asylum issues. UNHCR supported the authorities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine in applying for European Commission funding to improve Government capacity to respond to the challenges they face.

UNHCR's concerns for the *refoulement* of 11 Uzbeks from Ukraine in early 2006, of whom nine were asylum-seekers, led the Government to recognize deficiencies in respecting its obligations as a signatory of the international refugee instruments. The Government extended the temporary legal stay of refugees from Abkhazia.

The Söderköping Cross Border Cooperation Process, focusing on Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine as well as seven neighbouring EU Member States, remains a forum for further exchange of experience and policy development on migration and asylum issues. This has resulted in greater participation by the involved governmental authorities.





UNHCR/R. Hackman.

Many Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia live in Zugdidi district, but are allowed to cross back into Gali town to visit family or tend to their properties.

In the whole of the southern Caucasus progress was made on gender, age and diversity mainstreaming in all activities. This triggered the launch of various participatory assessments, which in turn will help UNHCR adjust programmes in the region according to the needs of the people of concern to the Office.

In Armenia, a census was initiated with the cooperation of the State Migration Agency. The preliminary findings revealed that the majority of ethnic Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan had either naturalized or opted for onward migration. UNHCR also assisted the Government in re-drafting the Armenian Law on Asylum while continuing to phase down its shelter operation, with all the Office's activities in this sector to be completed in 2007.

UNHCR played an instrumental role in assisting the Government of Georgia in elaborating a national IDP strategy. The final document was released in late 2006 and stressed that IDPs have the right to integrate locally, without prejudice to their right of return, thus opening the way for a framework on durable solutions. UNHCR provided comments to the draft law on the return of Meskhetians, and provided extensive technical advice in the development of a property restitution law for those affected by the Georgian-Osset conflict. The law was eventually adopted at the end of 2006 and incorporated the most salient comments made by UNHCR.

In Azerbaijan, a thorough multi-agency review of more than 3,000 urban refugees, 80 per cent of whom are Chechens, was conducted. The findings revealed that there was a need to increase and widen the level of assistance for this group. UNHCR submitted to the Government a comprehensive proposal on amending the current legal framework for refugees, which addressed several shortcomings in the national asylum legislation and practice. The proposal recommended the introduction of legal protection in situations of large influxes either through *prima facie* recognition of refugee status or by granting temporary protection. The proposal also includes provisions on complementary forms of protection. This initiative is primarily aimed at providing legal protection for Chechen refugees who are currently excluded from the existing Government refugee status determination (RSD) procedure.

Co-chaired by UNHCR and IOM, and organized in cooperation with ILO, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the Council of Europe, a thematic meeting within the framework of the European-Asian Programme on Forced Displacement and Migration took place in late 2006. The meeting focused on the subject of data collection and exchange, including registration.

Constraints

In Moldova and Ukraine, the reorganization and restructuring of governmental institutions responsible for

asylum and migration slowed down progress in the field of refugee protection. UNHCR is concerned that no complementary or temporary protection is as yet available in Belarus and Ukraine. No state-funded integration programmes are available in any of these three countries.

In Georgia, while negotiations over Abkhazia and South Ossetia have continued despite a tense political climate, numerous security incidents affected UNHCR's programme delivery. As a result, there were no refugee returns from North Ossetia/Alania (Russian Federation) in 2006, and only a few IDPs in Georgia requested UNHCR's assistance to return to South Ossetia. Providing durable solutions to Chechen refugees in the Pankisi Valley remained difficult.

In other parts of the region, UNHCR's cooperation with the Governments needs to be reinforced in respect of the implementation of the 1951 Convention, in particular, and solutions, in general.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in the **Russian Federation** are described in a separate chapter. The following covers operations in the rest of Eastern Europe.

In **Belarus**, UNHCR's comments and recommendations for amendments in the draft of the new Law on Refugees were mostly accommodated by the authorities; however, efforts continue to ensure that the application of the new law is consistent with international standards. Training was provided to 350 officials and a computerized refugee registration programme was developed. Construction commenced on a temporary accommodation centre in Gomel in 2006, with work expected to be completed in early 2007. An innovative scheme to assist refugees to become self-reliant continued with two small enterprises run by refugees. In 2006, UNHCR initiated and chaired the UN Country Team Theme Group on Cross Border Cooperation. Negotiations with the Government of Belarus regarding the conclusion of a Host Country Agreement continued in 2006.

Asylum-seekers were provided with free legal aid and representation in the **Republic of Moldova**. All vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers received basic humanitarian assistance. Training activities targeted the judiciary, police, lawyers and ministry-level officials and contributed to enhancing the expertise of the Government in the field of asylum. At the end of 2006, there were more than 160 recognized refugees and, according to the Government, also more than 1,700 stateless persons living in the country.

In **Ukraine**, close to 2,300 recognized refugees lived in the country at the end of 2006 and 1,500 asylum applications were lodged. A more efficient legal and social assessment procedure was established in 2006 as a result of UNHCR's continuing capacity-building support. Resettlement remained the most viable solution for many refugees and UNHCR successfully facilitated the departure of 161 refugees from Ukraine. Furthermore, an NGO network was created in 2006 to provide greater support to asylum-seekers and refugees.

In **Armenia**, UNHCR worked with the authorities to bring the country's asylum system in line with international standards. In order to complement the national housing programme for naturalized refugees, UNHCR addressed the shelter needs of 133 vulnerable families who were not eligible for the government programme. Approximately 5,900 vulnerable people living in 166 collective centres throughout the country benefited from UNHCR's targeted interventions. Close to 100 bedridden older people were looked after individually, while the electricity bills of more than 800 impoverished older people were covered by UNHCR. Vocational training targeted more than 150 young people and 400 asylum-seekers. In conjunction with the Armenian Social Investment Fund and UNDP, one community centre in the village of Yeghegis was rehabilitated.

UNHCR's assistance to more than 1,400 Chechen refugees in the Pankisi Valley in **Georgia** continued in 2006, with a focus on strengthening the self-reliance aspect of its programme. Four income-generating projects were implemented to benefit more than 50 refugee families.

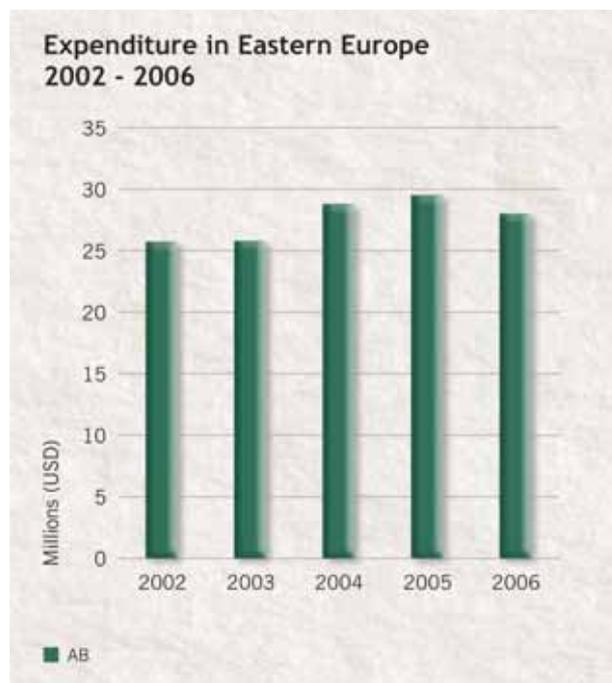
UNHCR provided shelter assistance to a limited number of returnees to South Ossetia, as well as winterization kits and helped improve conditions for those IDPs still living in collective centres. Legal advice was provided to more than 140 IDPs mainly on property restitution. In West Georgia, public information for IDPs was broadcast regularly, while targeted training was provided to local NGOs in Abkhazia. UNHCR partially rehabilitated seven schools and distributed winterizations kits to IDPs and returnees in Abkhazia.

In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR continued to provide protection and assistance to more than 1,900 Chechen refugees. Four collective centres for IDPs near Baku were rehabilitated to the benefit of approximately 700 residents, while six schools benefiting some 1,000 children were partially rehabilitated. UNHCR also carried out self-reliance activities and supported a medical clinic.

Financial Information

Operational partnerships compensated partially for the decreasing budgets for this area. Additional funding received in 2006 allowed UNHCR to provide supplementary assistance, such as firewood to IDPs in Georgia and higher living allowances for urban refugees in Azerbaijan. However, actual needs remained far greater than that which UNHCR could financially support.

UNHCR's expenditure in Eastern Europe has remained more or less constant since 2002. Since then, expenditures have increased slightly, due to earmarked contributions for unplanned activities in various countries, such as building the national asylum systems of Belarus and Ukraine.



Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	AB	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Armenia	1,902,345	1,733,147
Azerbaijan	3,858,800	3,477,350
Belarus	1,319,833	1,291,288
Georgia	4,887,532	4,157,938
Republic of Moldova	786,301	725,543
Russian Federation	15,379,981	12,974,325
Ukraine	3,816,670	3,112,706
Regional activities ¹	570,992	543,649
Total	32,522,454	28,015,946

¹ Includes regional activities in western Newly Independent States.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking	Donor	AB
Eastern Europe		
	European Commission	357,541
	Japan	500,000
	Sweden	1,130,653
	United States	5,300,000
Sub-total		7,288,194
Armenia		
	Switzerland	413,223
	United States	100,000
Sub-total		513,223
Azerbaijan		
	European Commission	642,674
	Norway	26,624

Earmarking	Donor	AB
	Switzerland	806,924
	United States	100,000
Sub-total		1,576,221
Belarus		
	Norway	26,624
Sub-total		26,624
Georgia		
	Germany	255,102
	Norway	26,624
	Switzerland	1,134,867
	United States	590,042
Sub-total		2,006,635
Republic of Moldova		
	Norway	26,624
	Liechtenstein	31,008
Sub-total		57,632
Russian Federation		
	Canada	181,818
	European Commission	1,558,314
	Japan	300,000
	Netherlands	850,000
	Private donors in the Russian Federation	4,456
	Switzerland	2,926,401
	United States	2,000,000
Sub-total		7,820,988
Ukraine		
	European Commission	429,947
Sub-total		429,947
Total		19,719,465