

EASTERN EUROPE

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

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The prospects for safe return and integration of the displaced populations in the Caucasus region remain bleak amidst continued conflict and difficult security conditions. There are still over 135,000 Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia (Russian Federation), and some 7,000 Chechen refugees are hosted in Georgia.

The Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia have held numerous bilateral meetings over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but no immediate breakthrough has surfaced. The OSCE-Minsk Group and other parties involved consider the negotiation process to have contributed positively towards a settlement. It is hoped that the accession of Azerbaijan and Armenia to the Council of Europe (January 2001) will encourage both countries to assume further responsibilities in improving human rights conditions and offer them a forum to continue their dialogue aimed at resolving the conflict.

The security situation in Gali (Georgia), to where some 41,000 IDPs spontaneously have returned, remains precarious. The latest Co-ordinating Council meeting could not take place despite the continued efforts of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to find political solutions to the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict. The rate of return of refugees/displaced persons from the Georgian-South Osset conflict zone to their places of origin is still insignificant. The Joint Control Commission for the Georgian-Osset conflict held meetings to elaborate on the management of a Russia-Georgia programme (signed in December 2000) for the rehabilitation of the economy in the conflict zone. Mutual agreement has yet to be reached over its implementation.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, PROGRESS AND CONSTRAINTS

UNHCR maintained its approach of measured interventions in addressing issues related to population displacement in several “frozen” conflicts. Operations and assistance projects were designed to address emergency responses and acute needs, facilitating local integration and return when and where feasible. Increased concerns over insecurity in certain areas constrained UNHCR’s access to refugees and IDPs. Assessments of the situation in return areas and support for local integration of returnees were therefore hampered. In response to the UNHCR’s Action 2 exercise, strict prioritisation measures were applied in all country programmes. As a result, assistance to non-core beneficiaries was reduced in Russia, Georgia and Ukraine. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, the previously planned phase down and hand over has been accelerated and assistance to the most vulnerable persons is being further consolidated.

The countries in Eastern Europe are amending asylum and citizenship legislation and developing up-to-standard asylum systems with the assistance of UNHCR. National capacities, including in refugee status determination, are being enhanced through collaborative and comprehensive measures, linking them to the broader migration management. As a result, access to asylum procedures has significantly improved and legal solutions are increasingly found for persons of concern.

UNHCR’s national and bilateral interventions are paralleled by regional and multiparty approaches. For instance UNHCR and the Swedish Government held a country cluster workshop (May 2001) for Lithuania, Poland, Belarus and Ukraine on better co-operation on refugee and migration

matters in the framework of border management.

Refugee law promotion was organised region-wide through training, study tours, internship and workshops, benefited government officials, NGOs, and UNHCR staff. These sessions not only improved knowledge on safeguarding refugee-protection principles, but also enhanced partnership, cross-fertilisation and experience sharing.

Strategies for mainstreaming activities in support of refugee children have been pursued with special attention on five key issues: documentation, citizenship, access to education, access to refugee status determination procedures and guardianship for separated children.

UNHCR is in the process of reviewing its regional NGO-strategy to determine future priorities for ensuring sustainability and partnerships, with a view of further mainstreaming the NGO-component into country operations.

As a result of the decision reached in the final session of the Steering Group (July 2000) on the "Follow up to 1996 Geneva Conference on the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Migration and Asylum Issues", the process is now focused on four thematic areas, reflecting the CIS-countries remaining priorities: building asylum; migration and border management; NGO sector sustainability; and partnership. The implementation of the new work plan has started in 2001, with input from the lead agencies UNHCR, IOM, OSCE and the Council of Europe. The main constraints include insufficient degree of ownership of the process on the part of the CIS States and a growing tendency to prioritise migration control over asylum and protection issues. Attention has been paid to and progress achieved on citizenship issues. An inter-agency coordination meeting in Vienna in July 2001 of field representatives of the four lead agencies agreed to fine-tune the

modalities of interaction, avoid overlap and enhance co-operation in the CIS region.

ACTIVITIES UNTIL 30 JUNE 2001

Reports on country programmes in **Georgia** and the **Russian Federation** are presented in separate chapters. A summary of UNHCR's main activities during the first months of the year in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine is provided below.

In **Armenia**, the adoption of the national Law on "Legal and Socio-Economic Guarantees for Persons Forcibly Displaced in 1988-92 from Azerbaijan" in December 2000 constitutes a major step towards further integration of the refugees. UNHCR has extended its legal, technical and material assistance to relevant authorities in drafting sub-legislation, training officials, and publishing of brochures on the implementation of the new Law. In pursuit of the policy to promote naturalisation, UNHCR supported the State Department for Migration and Refugees in its co-ordination role on naturalisation issues. As result, 9,575 refugees have been assisted to acquire Armenian citizenship during the reporting period. In an attempt to bridge the gap over a national welfare system that has many shortcomings, UNHCR provided basic assistance to the most vulnerable refugee groups, some 9,500 refugees, including female-headed house-holds and older persons living in temporary/dilapidated shelters. UNHCR and the Government continued their co-operation to meet the shelter needs of refugees. The Government made available several uncompleted public buildings. UNHCR is assisting the reconstruction of these buildings into 298 flats for accommodation with the support of a technical advisor seconded by the Swiss Government. OSCE in co-operation with UNHCR finalised a draft law on the registration of the population in Armenia, including refugees, in accordance with international standards. As a result of UNHCR's lobbying, the national Law on Refugees was been amended with regard to

provisions related to grounds for rejection of claims for refugee status.

In **Azerbaijan**, though arrivals of asylum-seekers from Chechnya (Russian Federation) started in 2000, the Office was confronted with a sharp increase of asylum-seekers in need of international protection and assistance as their stay prolonged. Efforts and resources had to be diverted to address the situation as prospects of return remained slim. Some 3,100 persons have now registered with UNHCR which issues "protection letters" to prevent their *refoulement*. Basic assistance was extended to the most vulnerable families with some subsistence allowances, medical care, and psychosocial and legal counselling.

An agreement has been reached with the Government to form a national entity for Refugee Status Determination, as a part of building national structures and gradual handing over UNHCR activities in this field. Meanwhile, UNHCR continued to conduct eligibility interviews of asylum-seekers. A total of 135 eligibility decisions have been made. Of these, 53 cases have been recognised under UNHCR Mandate, during the reporting period.

UNHCR has been engaged in inter-agency planning to be prepared for efficient action when a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is found. Pending conflict resolution and conditions conducive for return, UNHCR - in co-operation with the Government, NGO partners and some development agencies (UNDP, UNICEF and World Bank) - is assisting the settlement of selected vulnerable internally displaced families in sites provided by the local authorities. The construction of the first 45 houses has almost been completed. Some 180 families have been identified to move into the settlement. The communities have elected committees to manage their communal affairs. Vocational training and income-generation activities are being introduced to promote self-reliance in these settlements. In partnership with UNICEF,

UNHCR will support community-based primary schools.

The Law on Registration of Legal Entities has been a stumbling block for the development of a national NGO-sector in Azerbaijan. The law is currently being amended, and UNHCR and the Council of Europe has intervened with the Government, offering legal advice and technical expertise to amend the law to an acceptable international standard.

In **Belarus**, the national legislature passed a law on the accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol in April 2000, and the President of Belarus ratified it in May 2001. UNHCR will provide technical support to the working group that has been set up to draft the Law of the Republic "On Amending the Law on Refugees" to bring the national legislation in line with the Conventions on Refugees.

UNHCR continued to assist, both bilaterally but also through regional workshops, in the development of a migration management system that takes into account the need for a referral system to RSD procedures. A steady growth in the number of recognised refugees in Belarus has been observed. The total increased by 100, reaching 569 recognised refugees by mid-2001. Some 1,200 asylum-seekers and refugees received legal counselling and assistance.

In March 2001, the Government of **Moldova** decreed the formation a relevant entity to co-ordinate refugee issues. UNHCR provided its comments on the draft Law on Refugee Status, and continued its advocacy for accession to the 1951 Convention. The draft law was approved for its reading in May 2001. The Parliamentary Working Group has been re-established to draft legislation on the accession.

Asylum-seekers and former students must legalise their stay in the country upon expiry of their residence permit. UNHCR, in co-operation with CoE, promotes the application of the European Convention on

Human Rights to provide protection against *refoulement*. Precedent court judgements have confirmed the positive effect of UNHCR's "protection letters" on sanction against illegal stay. UNHCR enhanced its efforts for reducing the backlog of refugee status determination to ensure speedy access to asylum procedures. Needy asylum-seekers and refugees were provided with financial support and basic assistance. Of these, 15 vulnerable and family-reunion cases were resettled in third countries. UNHCR closely monitors the implementation of the new Citizenship Law, which entered into effect in August 2000. In partnership with NGOs, UNHCR continues to assist the persons of concern who may be eligible to receive statelessness documents or to be naturalised.

In **Ukraine**, the Parliament adopted the new Law on Refugees in June 2001, after UNHCR's support and intensive lobbying campaign that lasted some five years. The law is fully in line with the 1951 Convention. Its provisions will resolve long-standing problems. Travel documents are being issued and special procedures for unaccompanied minors and family reunion have been introduced. In April 2001, the President of Ukraine signed the Law on Childhood Protection to implement the Convention on Rights of Child. UNHCR comments were incorporated in the law. Special training and capacity building activities were carried out. Training on RSD procedures and country-of-origin information for migration officials was conducted jointly with the Swedish Migration Services. A joint ECRE/UNHCR seminar on the safe country principles paved the way for

modifying the draft refugee law to be consistent with international standards. The establishment of four legal clinics is underway. Assistance projects are being reoriented from care and maintenance to local integration. UNHCR in Crimea provided support to both governmental and NGOs with a view to expedite the processing of citizenship of the remaining stateless persons. On the basis of the Citizenship Law that was adopted in March 2001, 5,334 formerly deported persons acquired Ukrainian citizenship.

OUTLOOK FOR JULY- DECEMBER

Efforts will be continued to assist states in Eastern Europe to accede to international conventions on refugees and statelessness as well as develop adequate and effective asylum systems that are in compliance with international standards and build national capacities for their implementation. UNHCR, in collaborations with OSCE, CoE, IOM, NGOs and other partners, will also pursue the implementation of the thematic work plan as a follow-up of the 1996 CIS Conference. Particular emphasis will be placed on activities to ensure asylum safeguards in border management systems. It is planned to hold two meetings and sub-regional conferences on these matters.

UNHCR's operations in displaced population areas and refugee-like situations will be further consolidated to facilitate temporary integration, where feasible, and facilitate return to places of origin where and when security and political stability allow.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

Country	Annual Programme Budget			
	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available ¹	Obligation Level
Armenia	3,522,976	2,920,548	1,365,304	1,360,225
Azerbaijan	4,140,769	3,926,491	2,045,828	1,749,783
Belarus	797,885	774,361	393,200	393,200
Georgia	8,526,634	7,040,151	3,624,549	3,083,642
Republic of Moldova	1,050,970	1,048,942	367,835	361,764
Russian Federation	21,153,778	17,011,820	7,418,968	6,971,100
Ukraine	3,709,587	2,940,874	1,762,391	1,672,902
Regional Projects ²	102,900	817,900	338,320	284,045
TOTAL	43,005,499	36,481,087	17,316,395	15,876,661

¹ Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.

² This includes costs for projects in the Commonwealth of Independent States.