



# Eastern Europe

## Working environment

There has been some improvement in security in the subregion, though the situation remains volatile. The gains have allowed the United Nations to lower its security alert level in Chechnya from Phase Five to Four (see Glossary). A permanent UN presence will be re-established in Grozny, making it easier to monitor returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The first year of the Inter-Agency Transitional Work Plan for the northern Caucasus was a success. The donor community strongly supported UNHCR's efforts to protect and assist refugees and find durable solutions for the displaced.

Several important developments took place in the southern Caucasus in 2006. New oil revenues from the trans-Caucasus pipeline bolstered the budget of Azerbaijan and negotiations to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh moved forward.

In Armenia, an ongoing refugee census confirms the success of the Government's naturalization strategy for ethnic Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan. Following analysis of protection gaps, a new asylum law is being drafted. The conflict in the Middle East in 2006 saw about 600 mostly ethnic Armenians from Lebanon, Syria and Israel flee to Armenia; 250 of them have applied for asylum.

Armenia

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Georgia

Republic of Moldova

Russian Federation

Ukraine



In Azerbaijan, since neither resettlement nor voluntary repatriation are viable options for the majority of mandate refugees, UNHCR will focus on local integration and the adoption of a temporary protection regime for certain categories of such refugees, mainly Chechens.

In Georgia, following the mission in late 2005 of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, the Government has begun to formulate a national plan to provide strategic direction for improving the living conditions of internally displaced populations with broad-based governmental and international support. The progressive rise throughout the year in tensions between the Russian Federation and Georgia has had a negative impact on the prospects of resolving the conflicts in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, two peace processes led by the United Nations and the OSCE, respectively.

Belarus and Ukraine are now located along the eastern border of the expanded European Union, while the Republic of Moldova will border the Union in 2007. All three countries are confronted with common challenges with regard to establishing comprehensive migration policies, building national asylum systems and finding durable solutions for refugees. UNHCR has supported cross-border linkages between the European Union and the States beyond its eastern border, as well between those States themselves. Many of these exchanges are channeled through the Söderköping Process, which offers an integrated forum for cross-border dialogue on migration and asylum.

## Strategy

UNHCR's primary objective is to improve asylum systems in line with international standards. UNHCR will strive to provide durable solutions to Chechen refugees in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Office's expanded role in responding to internal displacement will become more evident in the Caucasus, where there are currently close to one million IDPs. The engagement with IDPs is closely linked to UNHCR's participation in conflict resolution efforts throughout the region. The office will pay particular attention to specific vulnerable groups and make its plans with the participation of all partners. Lessons learned from gender, age and diversity analyses will be mainstreamed into all operations.

In Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, UNHCR's strategy for 2007 is to improve asylum systems which at present are not sustainable without external assistance. UNHCR will continue to strengthen the capacity of all partners involved in the asylum-building process.

## Constraints

A continued tense security situation in the conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia could affect UNHCR's operations. The frozen peace process and the unresolved status of the two breakaway regions continue to hamper the work of development agencies and donors. The lack of security and social infrastructure, as well as the lack of a legal framework for the restitution of property in South Ossetia, also impede returns.



Georgia. Thanks to UNHCR income-generating and skills-training projects, many IDPs are able to sustain themselves and their families. UNHCR / R. Hackman.

Not many resettlement countries accept Chechen refugees, and a smaller number of Chechens were resettled last year than in previous years, while the legal framework is not conducive to local integration.

In Armenia, nascent national welfare structures, a tight UNHCR budget and the appreciation of the local currency against the US dollar are the biggest constraints for durable solutions.

Azerbaijan remains a destination and transit country for asylum-seekers and refugees. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the resulting displacement continue to overshadow all other issues in the country.

In Belarus the constraints continue to be the absence of a comprehensive complementary or humanitarian status; gaps in national legislation; a lack of readmission agreements with neighbouring States; and insufficient free legal aid for asylum-seekers and refugees. Other challenges include the *propiska* (residency permit) regime, which makes it difficult for refugees and asylum-seekers to join the labour market and access social and health services. Furthermore, refugees and asylum-seekers are not provided with Convention travel documents.

A difficult economic situation and dependence on external support affects the ability of the Republic of Moldova to deal with illegal migration, the trafficking of women and asylum issues. Internal political conflicts could hinder the development of a coherent asylum and migration policy and related institutions. A breakdown of negotiations over the region of Transdniestra could reverse reconciliation efforts.

Ukraine's asylum institutions remain weak, and national legislation needs to be brought in line with international

standards. Difficulties in gaining access to asylum procedures are aggravated by insufficient reception capacity. The prospects for local integration of recognized refugees are very limited. Furthermore, inadequate resources and frequent administrative reforms affect the retention rate of experienced staff.

## 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 **Armenia**, UNHCR will conclude the refugee census and end a shelter programme for the local integration of naturalized refugees. In collaboration with the authorities and the Danish Refugee Council, the Office will help draft a new asylum law in accordance with international standards. UNHCR's plan to phase out assistance to vulnerable naturalized refugees from Azerbaijan will hinge on the Government's ability to meet the needs of this group. Meanwhile, UNHCR will continue to assist 10,000 people of concern who have special needs.

In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR and the Government will develop a framework for the possible return of IDPs when the situation permits. The Office will also speak out for the rights of IDPs, including the right to better living conditions. UNHCR will encourage the Government to better meet the needs of refugees and of asylum-seekers in health care, education and access to employment while their cases are being examined. The awareness of relevant officials of reception standards in other countries will be promoted through expert meetings, study tours abroad and training.

In **Georgia**, the Office will focus on strengthening the self-sufficiency of Chechen refugees living in the Pankisi Valley. Strengthening the asylum system will include the regularization of refugee status in Georgia's legal system and building the Government's capacity to deal with referrals, receive asylum-seekers in accordance with international standards and conduct refugee status determination. To achieve these goals UNHCR will work closely with relevant counterparts in the Government, the judiciary, the media and civil society.

UNHCR will reaffirm its engagement in issues pertaining to internal displacement which are linked to conflict resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Office will continue providing technical support to the Government in the development and implementation of the national strategy on internally displaced persons. To support returns the Office will implement confidence-building measures, rehabilitate undertake schools and undertake capacity-building activities for local NGOs and local authorities.

**Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine** do not consider asylum issues among their top priorities, as they are often preoccupied by wider political, social and economic problems. Financial constraints make it difficult for these Governments to build asylum systems in line with international standards. UNHCR's technical and financial assistance is vital if these States are to meet their obligations to asylum-seekers.

In Belarus, UNHCR will provide targeted assistance and training to sustain indispensable parts of the national asylum system. The Office will cooperate with the Ministry of the Interior to improve asylum laws and with the regional authorities in the integration of recognized refugees.

In the Republic of Moldova, UNHCR will support the recently created Bureau for Migration and Asylum within the Ministry of the Interior. Appeal judges and the national and border police will be trained in refugee law.

UNHCR will also provide basic assistance to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees. Within a broader regional context, UNHCR will help the authorities develop a sustainable integration programme for refugees.

In Ukraine, UNHCR will provide legal and technical advice on new draft laws on refugees and aliens in particular with a view to ensure the introduction of complementary and temporary protection regimes to close important protection gaps. It will also help the asylum authorities and relevant ministries harmonize national asylum laws with the 1951 Refugee Convention so that refugees can access social services. UNHCR will provide legal and material support to asylum-seekers through its network of implementing partners. The Office will also promote Ukraine's accession to instruments on statelessness and assist the authorities to deal both with Crimean Tartars and ethnic Georgian refugees who fled the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Armenia	1,535,176	1,410,270
Azerbaijan	3,564,813	3,023,063
Belarus	1,054,028	977,312
Georgia	4,304,911	4,462,858
Republic of Moldova	624,950	618,977
Russian Federation	15,609,817	13,415,656
Ukraine	3,054,883	3,073,876
Regional activities <sup>1</sup>	195,000	100,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,943,578</b>	<b>27,082,012</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes activities in: Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

