



Eastern Europe

Working environment

States in the region are countries of origin, transit and final destination, both for migrants as well as for people in need of international protection. However, asylum issues are generally given low priority, due to the many political, social and economic challenges facing Governments in the region. Financial constraints further reduce capacity to build and maintain asylum systems, despite the strategic location of countries on the eastern border of the European Union. Within this context, UNHCR supports the development of asylum systems which identify people of concern to the Office and ensure that they have access to adequate protection.

Protracted internal displacement situations in the region stem from unresolved territorial conflicts in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), Moldova (Transnistria) and Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh), affecting close to one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. In Georgia and Azerbaijan, IDPs continue to be a source of major political and social preoccupation. Durable solutions, notably sustainable return, can only be achieved if there is a peaceful resolution of these conflicts.

Armenia

Azerbaijan

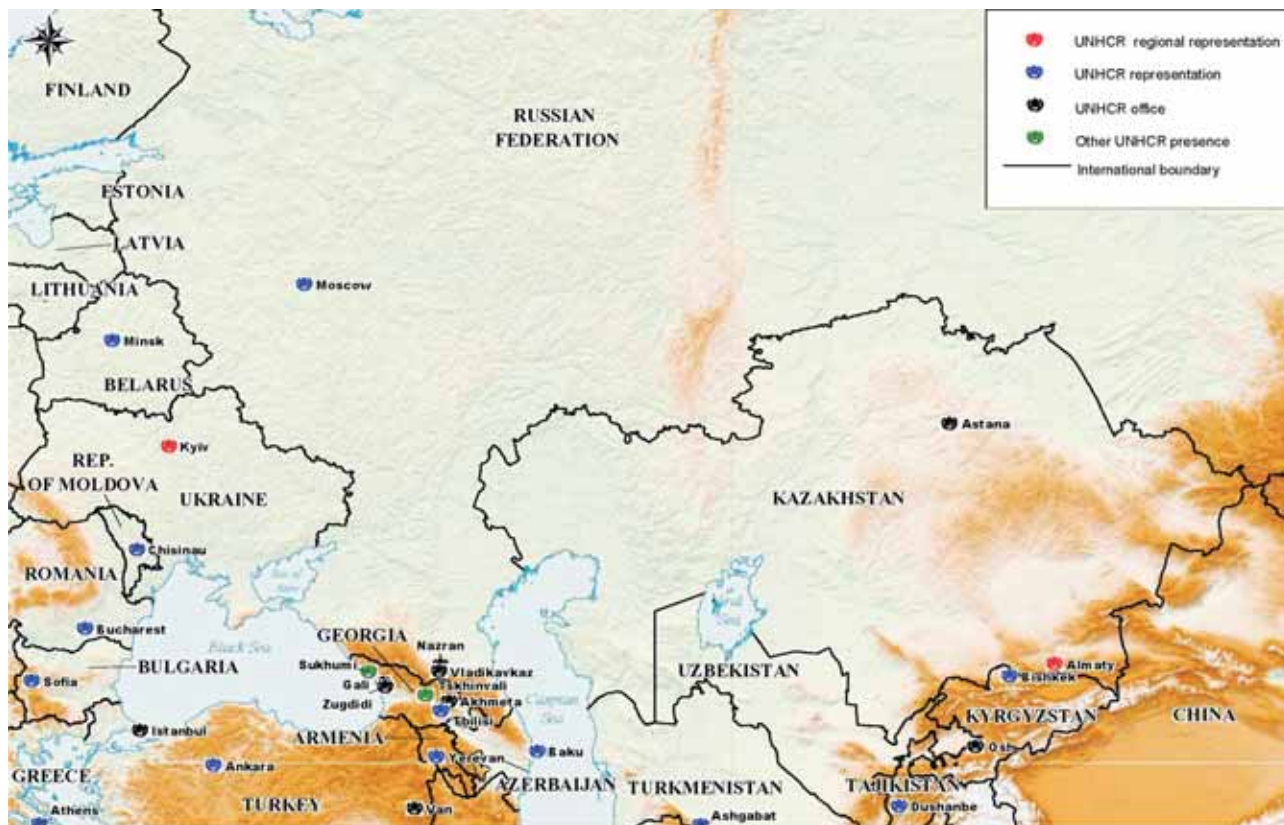
Belarus

Georgia

Moldova

Russian Federation

Ukraine



In Georgia, UNHCR supports the peace processes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and participates in working groups on return such as the Joint Control Commission. However, returns are limited. Georgia's national IDP strategy adopted in February 2007 is a major step forward, as it outlines the Government's vision and policy to improve and resolve the situation of IDPs, asserting their right to return. Despite the positive developments and greater consensus regarding needs and the right to durable solutions, traditional humanitarian interventions are still required to cover the persistent needs amongst the most vulnerable refugees, IDPs and returnees.

Among other issues of concern are the challenges facing long-term Chechen refugees in Georgia and Azerbaijan who have difficulty integrating locally, and have few opportunities for resettlement. UNHCR is also seeking to reduce statelessness, for instance by providing Meskhetians with the opportunity to voluntarily return to Georgia and by supporting the naturalization of stateless individuals in the Ukraine.

Strategy

In Eastern Europe, the Office will pursue durable solutions, strengthen national asylum systems and address the needs of the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR also seeks to prevent and reduce the incidence of statelessness in the region.

UNHCR will, on behalf of refugees and IDPs, pursue durable solutions wherever possible, including through acquisition of citizenship, local integration, voluntary repatriation, and will seek limited resettlement opportunities for the most vulnerable refugees.

By providing support through appropriate structures, UNHCR will identify and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers. The Office will advocate for a greater commitment by development actors such as UN Country Team members to include vulnerable refugees in their target groups. Through needs assessments and outreach, a deeper understanding of sexual and gender-based violence will be developed to help improve responses to sexual and gender-based violence among refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR will seek to strengthen national asylum systems and safeguard asylum in the broader migration context, including through dynamic partnerships with actors including the European Union, national governments and NGOs. As appropriate, as for example in Azerbaijan, UNHCR will seek the adoption of a temporary asylum regime in line with international standards.

UNHCR's presence in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine seeks to strengthen refugee protection on the eastern border of the European Union. The Söderköping Process plays a critical role in efforts to address the migration asylum nexus, and provides a forum for the EU, UNHCR, IOM and the three Governments concerned; however its funding is not secure beyond 2009. Through the European Neighbourhood Policy, the



Georgian IDP near Zugdidi.

European Union also stays engaged with asylum and migration issues and provides substantial funding for asylum and migration practices.

UNHCR is working to quantify the extent of statelessness in the region and assist Governments to implement legislation relating to the 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness.

Constraints

In the southern Caucasus, the tense situation surrounding Abkhazia and South Ossetia is a source of concern, with the majority of IDPs living below the poverty threshold. The appreciation of the local currency in Armenia against the US dollar affects both UNHCR budgets and beneficiaries, who are frequently dependent on remittances. The lack of integration and resettlement opportunities poses challenges to UNHCR's search for durable solutions for Chechen refugees in the sub-region.

In Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, xenophobia negatively affects the lives of asylum-seekers and refugees and hinders local integration. UNHCR will work with partners, including the Governments concerned, to combat such negative perceptions.

Limited funding makes it difficult for UNHCR to attain its objectives and implement higher quality assistance and monitoring activities.

Operations

The operations in the Russian Federation are described in a separate chapter.

In **Armenia**, UNHCR will address the identified gaps and obstacles for local integration, notably for naturalized

refugees and those residing in rural, remote and border areas. Currently, social and medical assistance is extended to 5,000 vulnerable individuals in two provinces, but this will be expanded countrywide, subject to the availability of funds. The Office will advocate for the Government to extend housing and social protection assistance to refugees.

UNHCR will pursue government capacity building and support the legislative process linked to the new asylum law. With regard to Iraqi refugees in Armenia, the Office is developing strategies for appropriate responses to their needs, including through legal, socio-economic and cultural integration. Other planned activities for the upcoming period include border-guard training, establishment of legal aid clinics, introduction of refugee law in university curricula and expansion of reception facilities.

While notable progress has been achieved in **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR will continue to address protection gaps and advocate with the Government to address basic social rights of asylum-seekers while their cases are being examined. UNHCR will provide financial assistance, primary health care and counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees. For IDPs, UNHCR will focus on protection activities including legal assistance and advocacy, and quick-impact projects such as targeted income generation. UNHCR will advocate for continued engagement by international agencies and donors, as well as continued or accelerated activity by the Government to improve their living conditions.

In **Belarus**, the lack of a country agreement and the need to register technical and humanitarian assistance with the Government complicates UNHCR's service delivery. Efforts to support the national asylum system and to effectively implement refugee status determination procedure continue. UNHCR is working with the Government on the preparation of a new Refugee Law which would introduce humanitarian status and hopefully fill legislative gaps. Limited care and maintenance activities are provided to extremely vulnerable individuals. The Office will continue to implement a capacity-building project to develop a border-monitoring mechanism.

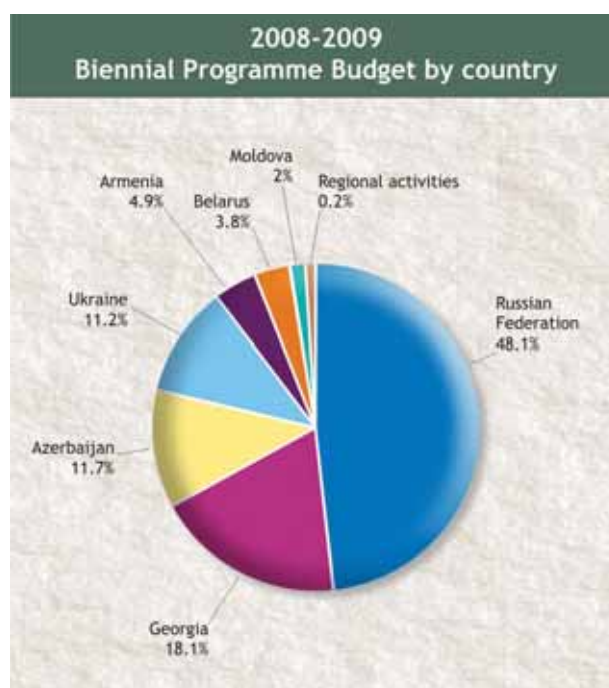
In **Georgia**, UNHCR will continue to support the authorities in implementing the national IDP strategy, improve IDP's living conditions and work towards the eventual closure of collective centres. UNHCR will promote self-reliance of IDPs through skills training, income-generating activities and information dissemination on issues of relevance for IDPs. UNHCR will also focus on improving the legal framework for IDPs in Georgia, through advocating for their integration and access to rights.

UNHCR will work to advocate for and find means to improve the local integration possibilities for Chechen refugees through increased income generation and self-help activities, in close collaboration with relevant authorities. UNHCR will support the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation with technical assistance to provide refugee ID cards or temporary residence permits for refugees. The Office will also advocate for Georgia's accession to the Statelessness Conventions. It will cooperate with the Government on the design of its strategy, legislative framework and procedures governing the return and integration of the Meskhetians, giving particular attention to the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

In **Moldova**, UNHCR will support the new refugee authority, the Bureau for Migration and Asylum, in providing protection for asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern. A new draft Refugee Law aimed at aligning the national legislation to the *European Asylum Acquis* is being drafted in close cooperation with UNHCR. Additional avenues being pursued to strengthen and align the national asylum system and improve border cooperation include bilateral activities with Romania. Limited assistance to refugees and others of concern will continue until sustainable integration programmes for refugees are developed and implemented by the Government.

In **Ukraine**, the Office cooperates with the Government in respect of asylum-seekers, recognized refugees, formerly deported people in Crimea, stateless persons and a small number of refugees. UNHCR is concerned about the low refugee recognition rate. The Office has continued to work closely with the authorities in proposing amendments to the draft Law on Refugees which would introduce complementary and temporary forms of protection, as well as addressing existing gaps

in the current legislation. Assistance measures for asylum-seekers and refugees are limited, though it is hoped that the number of places in temporary accommodation centres would increase if funding is forthcoming. UNHCR will provide free legal aid and limited material, social and medical assistance to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees. Draft legislation on free legal aid is under consideration and, if approved and funded by the Government, may enter into effect in 2010. UNHCR will also continue and strengthen its border monitoring capacity, under the framework of the 10-Point Plan of Action. The Regional Representation in Kyiv also hosts the Secretariat for the Söderköping Process, and will encourage donors, partners, UN and other international agencies to engage in and provide support to asylum and refugee issues and advocate for proactive government participation.



Budget (USD)

Country	Annual Programme Budget		
	2007	2008	2009
Armenia	1,410,270	1,294,127	1,265,348
Azerbaijan	3,023,063	2,962,902	3,095,745
Belarus	977,312	1,007,851	938,825
Georgia	4,462,858	4,680,511	4,710,683
Republic of Moldova	618,977	606,496	453,141
Russian Federation	13,415,656	12,511,699	12,447,737
Ukraine	3,073,876	2,853,172	2,930,524
Regional activities ¹	100,000	50,000	50,000
Total	27,082,012	25,966,758	25,892,003

¹ Includes activities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.