



Eastern Europe

Major developments

In Armenia, UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council produced an analysis of gaps in the protection and asylum framework. Round-table talks were held with national stakeholders, including the State Department for Migration and Refugees, the border authorities and the judiciary, to address the shortcomings identified. UNHCR was gratified to see the Government include refugees and naturalized former refugees in its new national housing programme. For its part, UNHCR adjusted its own shelter programme to address certain resulting gaps. In collaboration with the State Department for Migration and Refugees, UNHCR carried out a pilot census of refugees and naturalized former refugees in Syunik Province. The findings confirmed the need to revise downwards the number of those originating from Azerbaijan who still held refugee status.

In 2005, the main events in Azerbaijan were parliamentary elections and the inauguration of the oil pipeline linking the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas. These events represented a new level of political and financial stability, which proved conducive to progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiation process. A series of high-level meetings between the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides were held in early 2006 under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. The meetings were widely regarded as stepping stones leading towards the resolution of the crisis that dates back to the late 1980s. The hope was

Armenia

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Georgia

Republic of Moldova

Russian Federation

Ukraine

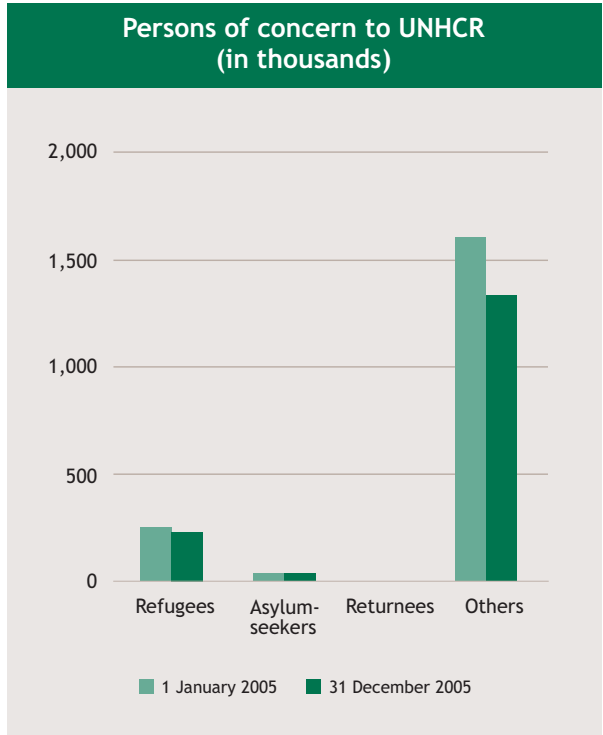


that this could in turn allow for the return of the majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The year also saw the completion of the state programme for poverty reduction and economic development in Azerbaijan. UNHCR led the working group on refugees and IDPs.

In Belarus, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, bordering the European Union (EU), UNHCR continued to support relevant government departments and the judiciary in order to strengthen the asylum systems in these three countries. Further action was taken to reinforce the role of civil society partners as well, and to build regional synergies with cross-border linkages.

The Söderköping/Cross Border Cooperation Process (CBCP), with its Secretariat in Kyiv, expanded its activities, in partnership with IOM, the Swedish Migration Board and the EU. This process further facilitated continued dialogue on asylum, migration and border management issues between Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and the EU member and candidate States bordering these three countries. Information sharing was reinforced through the launching of the CBCP website.

In October 2005 the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Conference process reached its conclusion. This marked the end of a productive ten-year multilateral effort to address forced displacement and migration in the broader post-Soviet area. The participating countries and intergovernmental organizations agreed to build on their achievements within a new and geographically broader Eurasian framework.



Over 235,000 IDPs continue to live in extremely difficult conditions in Georgia as a result of the country's two unresolved internal conflicts. The Government of Georgia completed a countrywide IDP verification exercise in 2005. Some 13,300 IDPs from South Ossetia were found to be living in Georgia proper. Tensions remained high in and around South Ossetia, with a number of killings and kidnappings reported, as well as controversy regarding three mortar shells that hit the regional capital Tskhinvali on 20 September 2005. In addition, the Government of Georgia also sought to change the format of the peacekeeping talks and the Russian-led peacekeeping operation.

In Abkhazia too, insecurity was evident for much of the year, with many incidents reported. Close to 221,000

IDPs from Abkhazia were re-registered in 2005. The number of spontaneous returnees in the district of Gali was estimated to be between 45,000 and 50,000. These returnees were the subject of much discussion and planning, especially within the negotiating forum known as the Group of Friends of the United Nations Secretary-General for Georgia. UNHCR, standing alongside key NGO partners, presented its strategic directions, which are carefully targeted confidence-building measures designed to underpin efforts to protect and improve the well-being of returnees. This proposal was well received by all those involved in the conflict resolution process led by the United Nations Observation Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).

In the Russian Federation, a more far-reaching approach was adopted by all stakeholders in dealing with the multifaceted issues affecting the northern Caucasus. A common assessment concluded that, if security were to be improved, federal and international interventions should aim not only to provide much needed humanitarian aid, but also to identify and implement social and economic recovery programmes in the entire region. In addition, the Russian Federation became a regular contributor to UNHCR's annual programme in 2005.

Challenges and concerns

Armenia continued to suffer several interlinked consequences of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, over and above the common challenges faced by former Soviet republics, which have experienced the virtual collapse of social and economic infrastructure. In this context, marginalized and vulnerable groups of refugees who fled Azerbaijan almost a decade ago are still in need of UNHCR's direct assistance. In 2005 UNHCR observed

that increasing numbers of asylum-seekers were arriving in or transiting through Armenia. This proved challenging to the Armenian Government, which remains very much in need of the support UNHCR strives to provide.

Chechen refugees in Azerbaijan, living for the most part in Baku, continued to receive vital financial and medical assistance from UNHCR. They were also provided with legal counselling and limited resettlement opportunities in the absence of a fully-fledged governmental assistance programme or local integration opportunities. While the Government continues to host the Chechen refugees, achieving a formal temporary protection regime has thus far been elusive. Owing to budgetary constraints, UNHCR's assistance to Chechen refugees was limited to the bare minimum and deemed insufficient.

Azerbaijan now has a smooth-running governmental refugee status determination (RSD) system. While the RSD Department is in many ways progressing favourably, this is offset by a disappointing series of court rulings on refugee status decisions. The courts rejected all appeals against negative decisions on asylum claims.

The asylum systems in Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are still developing. Whilst committed to bringing national law and practice in relation to asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons in line with international standards, competing priorities and meagre state budgets allocated for such tasks resulted in constraints. In 2005, the asylum authorities in these three countries processed almost 2,000 new asylum claims (1,740 in Ukraine, 118 in Belarus and 141 in the Republic of Moldova). Only a total of 144 of these asylum-seekers were recognized as refugees (49 in Ukraine, 41 in Belarus and 54 in the Republic of Moldova). UNHCR was concerned that asylum-seekers, particularly those coming from the Russian Federation,

Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Final budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Armenia	1,988,316	1,847,293
Azerbaijan	3,699,338	3,481,910
Belarus	1,275,203	913,449
Georgia	4,781,884	4,622,493
Republic of Moldova	701,362	631,094
Russian Federation	15,805,379	15,004,100
Ukraine	3,195,585	2,761,132
Regional projects ¹	284,885	258,466
Total	31,731,952	29,519,937

¹ Includes scholarships for refugee students and regional activities in Newly Independent States.



Georgia: Chechen refugees inspect UNHCR stoves before choosing which one to take home to their family. In a very harsh climate, the stoves are a coveted item, essential for cooking and heating. Provision of firewood has helped to protect the environment and to reduce conflict between refugees and local communities. *UNHCR/ F. Kecheroud*

continued to have difficulty in accessing the territory and/or asylum procedures.

In Georgia, UNHCR continued to play an active role in the peace processes for Abkhazia and South Ossetia implemented under the aegis of UNOMIG and the OSCE respectively. In 2005, while no tangible progress was achieved in reaching a peace settlement, the best that could be achieved was the avoidance of armed conflict. The security situation, which had deteriorated in the summer of 2004, did so again in 2005. This impeded IDP returns to South Ossetia and created logistical difficulties in programme implementation by periodically restricting the movement of UNHCR staff and implementing partners.

The situation of Chechen refugees in Georgia, who mostly live in the Pankisi Valley, continued to be of concern to UNHCR. In 2005, only a small number found durable solutions through resettlement in third countries, while some refugees returned to Chechnya through a repatriation movement organized by the Russian

Federation. For the remaining majority, opportunities for income generation and local integration in Georgia were limited, and only basic humanitarian assistance were provided by UNHCR.

National asylum legislation was not fully in line with international standards. In response to a request by the Georgian Government, UNHCR submitted comprehensive comments on the draft Law on Refugees and the Law on Legal Status of Aliens. However, subsequent amendments to these two laws took little account of the main concerns expressed by UNHCR. Access at borders remained of particular concern, as border guards were not required by law to receive asylum applications at entry points.

With rapidly growing numbers of non-Chechen asylum-seekers, the lack of adequate reception arrangements remained a serious problem. Other than Chechens, who were recognized on a *prima facie* basis, not one single refugee was recognized by the Georgian Government in 2005 at first or second instance.

Progress towards solutions

All governments in the region were supported by UNHCR and undertook comprehensive analyses of the protection situation using a framework for identifying gaps in protection capacity. The analyses gave a clear picture of the situation of refugees and the main legislative and administrative institutions involved in their protection, as well as the constraints encountered in each country. A regional analysis based on these reports was presented at the last meeting of the CIS Conference.

In Armenia, UNHCR completed an analysis of needs and situations not addressed sufficiently by existing protection activities, and formulated a burden-sharing strategy on housing solutions involving both governmental and non-governmental partners. In addition, UNHCR assisted the authorities with the first phase of the national re-registration of refugees. Once completed, the new figures will assist both the Government and UNHCR to create better assistance programmes and find durable solutions for the refugee population.

In Azerbaijan, 28 people were recognized as refugees in 2005 compared to 18 in 2004. Azerbaijan's is one of the few functioning governmental RSD systems in the CIS.

Taking careful note of the potentially positive developments in the process of negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh, UNHCR took preliminary steps with the Government of Azerbaijan towards the design of a return plan, and made known its readiness to undertake an assessment of needs should a political agreement be reached.

UNHCR continued to support governmental efforts to establish adequate reception facilities in Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In Ukraine, the reception capacity for asylum-seekers was increased from 250 to 330 spaces. Nevertheless, two of the facilities were not fully operational due to insufficient state funding and ownership issues. In the Republic of Moldova, a reception centre for asylum-seekers was opened with capacity for 160 people. In Belarus, UNHCR assisted in improving the reception conditions for asylum-seekers and refugees.

In Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, UNHCR advocated for and facilitated the local integration of refugees as a durable solution. The number of naturalized refugees in Ukraine increased by 290 in 2005. Refugees continued to encounter legal, economic and social barriers when they sought to access essential services in these countries. These problems can be attributed to a lack of comprehensive refugee integration programmes, inadequate assistance provided by national services, and a lack of state resources. Under these

circumstances, UNHCR and its partners had to continue to meet the basic material needs of recognized refugees.

In Ukraine, UNHCR continued to be engaged in the legal integration of formerly deported persons. In 2005, almost 3,100 formerly deported persons who have returned became naturalized citizens of the country.

In 2005, more than 100 refugees were resettled from Georgia to third countries. While continuing to seek expanded resettlement opportunities for refugees who have no other durable solutions, UNHCR continued to urge the Georgian Government to facilitate local integration, including through granting citizenship or at least permanent residency to some Chechen refugees who have strong family ties with Georgia.

In March 2005, responding to a long-overdue commitment made to the Council of Europe to tackle the issue of deported Meskhetians and statelessness, a governmental commission was established to study the return of Meskhetians and to consider a provisional work plan for returns. The Georgian Government requested UNHCR's assistance not only in assessing the total number of Meskhetians originating from and willing to repatriate to Georgia, but also in helping create adequate conditions for their repatriation.

Operations

In **Armenia**, UNHCR provided on-the-job training to RSD staff, organized protection seminars for 30 border officials, and provided free legal counselling to close to 200 destitute asylum-seekers, as well as to refugees and naturalized former refugees. A comprehensive analysis of gaps in protection led to consultations with government officials, NGOs and persons of concern. The Office monitored the incorporation of the Department of Migration and Refugees into the Ministry of Territorial Administration. UNHCR also supported the Department's naturalization services, where 30 officials facilitated the naturalization of refugees. An information leaflet for asylum-seekers was produced in several languages for distribution at all border crossing points in Armenia.

UNHCR and its partners constructed or repaired homes for 38 families and began the construction of almost 60 dwellings for destitute families living in makeshift housing. The beneficiaries were selected following a UNHCR-funded needs assessment. UNHCR assisted over 7,500 refugees and naturalized former refugees living in precarious circumstances. More than 12,700 destitute refugees had access to health care through 22 health posts. Vocational training was provided to 80 persons of concern, while other activities to foster self-reliance were pursued in over 150 communal centres.

In view of the protracted nature of internal displacement in **Azerbaijan**, and UNHCR's limited funds – in sharp contrast to the increasing financial resources available to the Government – the Office had limited ability to provide material support to meet the needs of the country's large IDP population. Thus, in 2005, UNHCR concentrated on advocacy and was instrumental in clarifying coordination mechanisms for IDPs to be included in the development programmes of UN agencies, NGOs and governmental donors.

A verification of the registration of asylum-seekers and refugees was conducted in 2005. Although the results showed a significant decrease in numbers, the needs of the most vulnerable remained broadly unchanged. In this context, both financial and medical assistance for refugees, most of them Chechens, were covered by UNHCR to the extent possible in view of prevailing financial constraints. The Office also organized 19 training events to build the capacity of key stakeholders in the national asylum process.

In **Belarus**, UNHCR focused its activities on improving the quality of asylum in the context of mixed migration flows. The Office held a number of training sessions on refugee law and the asylum-migration nexus for migration officials and border guards as well as civil society. Public information activities organized by UNHCR included a film festival held in Minsk, which increased public awareness of refugee issues. Regarding durable solutions, UNHCR focused its advocacy efforts on the simplification of the acquisition of citizenship by recognized refugees. An innovative approach, which supports the integration of refugees, brought tangible results in the sustainable development of refugee communities. UNHCR continued to urge Belarus to accede to the international conventions on statelessness.

In the **Republic of Moldova**, UNHCR's main objectives were to assist the Government to improve the quality of RSD procedures through capacity-building activities, and to continue to support national NGOs that provide legal assistance to asylum-seekers and integration assistance to recognized refugees. UNHCR's advocacy led to amendments to the national law on the status of refugees. These introduced a form of complementary (humanitarian) protection, as well as modified exclusion and cancellation clauses. Previously, these clauses went beyond those in the 1951 Convention itself. In addition, another important development was that refugees were issued with identity cards for the first time.

In 2005, UNHCR continued to assist the Government of **Ukraine** in developing a national asylum system in accordance with international standards. UNHCR's advocacy resulted in welcome amendments to the refugee law, thereby improving regulations relating to

admissibility into the RSD procedure. The Office continued to call for other amendments, including the introduction of complementary protection. The enforcement of existing laws remained a challenge. UNHCR and its NGO partners established a committee to address the needs of separated children seeking asylum. UNHCR also continued to assist the Government in preventing and reducing statelessness. An analysis of the compatibility of Ukrainian legislation with the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness was published, while a joint seminar with the Council of Europe influenced amendments made to the citizenship law.

With financial and technical support provided by UNHCR, the Government of **Georgia** undertook an annual re-registration exercise of Chechen refugees in 2005. The final results had not been released at the time of writing, as the authorities were in the process of establishing the citizenship of certain refugees believed to be Georgian nationals.

Within the UN-led peace process on Abkhazia and together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, UNHCR continued to foster dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on the subject of return. In this context, UNHCR developed a two-year confidence-building strategy for Abkhazia. Through protection and assistance activities delivered by UNHCR and its partners, the strategy aims to build trust and confidence at the grassroots level between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities, contribute to the peace process, and in this way pave the way for sustainable returns. Broad support for such an approach from the international community and the concerned parties is helping to create an environment in which international organizations are willing to engage more intensively, in particular in the Gali district of Abkhazia, where an estimated 45,000 to 50,000 IDPs have returned of their own accord. Towards the end of the year, UNHCR had begun to implement some of the activities outlined within the strategy.

UNHCR also continued its voluntary repatriation assistance programme for those displaced as a result of the South Ossetian conflict. By the end of 2005, UNHCR assisted over 5,800 refugees and IDPs to return home. Assistance was focused on the rehabilitation of shelter but also included the provision of agricultural kits and winterization assistance. In this context, the Georgian Government reactivated the process of drafting a law on housing and property restitution. UNHCR supported this process by providing comments to the draft law and sharing its experience in this area. It also encouraged a proper consultative process to ensure the protection of the rights and interests of the displaced, emphasizing that a restitution process can contribute to confidence building and to creating conditions conducive to return.

The Office supported the Government of Georgia in carrying out a verification of IDPs registered in Georgia. It is expected that the updated information and related database will help the Government to streamline its assistance to IDPs and develop future projects to help them. Registration is also considered a vital first step for any potential return programme that may be established once the internal conflicts in Georgia come to an end. With the limited resources available, UNHCR, through its NGO partners, continued to raise IDPs' awareness of their rights and provided legal counselling. UNHCR also provided IDP youth and their vulnerable host communities with vocational and skills training to increase their self-reliance.

Funding

In Armenia, UNHCR's partners used their own funds to complement the Office's activities by carrying out what UNHCR could not. In particular, protection and shelter support was expanded. Despite budgetary constraints, UNHCR was able to help the Government to launch on a modest scale the much needed countrywide census of refugees.

In Georgia, despite the prevailing security situation, constructive negotiations led to hopes that conditions would improve for returnees to the district of Gali (Abkhazia). All concerned parties endorsed the activities proposed by UNHCR to build confidence at the grass-roots level. However, as these activities could not be integrated into the annual budget, their implementation was delayed.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget
Eastern Europe		
	Japan	250,000
	Sweden	1,361,573
	Switzerland	750,000
	United States	4,839,900
Sub-total		7,201,473
Armenia		
	Switzerland	416,667
	United States	100,000
Sub-total		516,667
Azerbaijan		
	Statoil, Azerbaijan	50,000
	Switzerland	1,174,998
Sub-total		1,224,998
Belarus		
	European Commission	495,251
	Lithuania	4,071
Sub-total		499,322
Georgia		
	Belgium	451,747
	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe	417,910
	Sweden	620,347
	Switzerland	587,637
	United States	17,000
Sub-total		2,094,642
Republic of Moldova		
	European Commission	114,150
Sub-total		114,150
Russian Federation		
	Canada	806,452
	European Commission	1,788,998
	Germany	648,508
	Japan	250,000
	Microsoft Corporation (USA)	24,900
	Netherlands	723,000
	Sweden	620,347
	Switzerland	500,000
	United States	1,500,000
Sub-total		6,862,205
Ukraine		
	European Commission	248,773
	Sweden	401,630
Sub-total		650,403
Total		19,163,861

¹ For more information on the earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.