



# **COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN**

**Executive Committee Summary**

**Country: Armenia**

**Planning Year: 2005**

# **Armenia 2005 Country Operations Plan**

## Part I: Executive Summary (a) Context and Beneficiary Population

### **Context**

The operational context in Armenia continues to be strongly influenced by the issue of the unresolved conflict over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. During 2003 the peace negotiations under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group practically came to a halt as both Armenia and Azerbaijan were pre-occupied with their Presidential elections. Although 2004 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the cease-fire agreement still holding today, prospects in the future to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict are considered slight. Against this background, local integration remains the best and more realistic durable solution available to refugees from Azerbaijan.

There is still a high potential for instability and human displacement in the Southern Caucasus region. Armenia's geographical location at the crossroads of Middle East, Asia and Europe also makes the country susceptible to the consequences of events there and to be increasingly used as a migration route to Europe, including by human traffickers and smugglers. This confronts Armenia with the on-going challenge of improving its national asylum system in order to effectively manage the complex nexus between asylum and migration.

Armenia continues to suffer from the inter-linked consequences of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the collapse of its former economy, and declining access to social services. Despite the rapid pace of recent GDP growth, which was 13.9% in 2003, the overall socio-economic situation in the country continues to be characterised by high levels of unemployment and pervasive poverty. Half of the population still lives below the poverty line, with refugees being among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. It is estimated that due to this situation some one million persons have emigrated from Armenia since 1989, including large numbers of refugees. With the adoption of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2003 the Government of Armenia (GoA) has shown its commitment to combat poverty and ensure a more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth to all, including locally integrating refugees. An important step in the same direction has been taken by the UN Country Team in Armenia in the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which identifies the reduction of economic, social and political inequality in Armenia as the overarching common goal for the period 2005-2009 and also includes refugees as a target group.

### **Protection Issues**

Asylum development, reduction of statelessness and local integration are the three major protection concerns in Armenia. With its geographical location, Armenia is increasingly becoming a transit point for irregular migrants as well as asylum-seekers trying to reach Western and Central Europe. This is evidenced by the growing number of asylum-seekers from non-CIS countries registered in Armenia. With the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, Armenia will be closer to its external

border and could well become a route more often taken by asylum-seekers in the future. Thus, while the basic elements of the national asylum system are in place, further efforts are necessary in order to improve the specific legal framework and its implementation in accordance with international standards in order to meet the likelihood of increased numbers of asylum-seekers arriving in Armenia.

There are substantial grounds to believe that refugees from Azerbaijan are *de jure* stateless while at the same time they are able to exercise a significant number of human rights. UNHCR's continued involvement in facilitating the naturalisation of refugees from Azerbaijan is based not only on implementing a durable solution for this refugee group (naturalisation being one of the numerous components of local integration), but also because of UNHCR's mandate to promote the reduction of statelessness. To date, some 65,000 refugees from Azerbaijan have voluntarily naturalised while others have kept their refugee status for various reasons, including psychological and socio-economic ones. UNHCR will remain engaged in both maintaining and codifying the existing facilitated naturalisation procedure so as to ensure that those refugees who make a free and informed choice to acquire Armenian citizenship will benefit from a predictable national legal and administrative framework for the reduction of statelessness.

The sustainable local integration of refugees in Armenia requires substantial long-term efforts to include refugee rights as well as their social and economic needs in the existing human rights mechanisms and development frameworks in the country. A key to local integration, and a major protection issue, will continue to be the solution of the refugees' shelter problem. This has to be achieved through a rights-based approach focused on establishing and implementing legal mechanisms to protect the housing rights of refugees.

### **UNHCR's role**

UNHCR's role in the field of asylum development in Armenia is based on the provision of its material support, organisational expertise and technical advice aimed at further improving and strengthening the national asylum legal framework and its on-going implementation. Consistent with UNHCR's compatibility analysis between Armenia's asylum-related legislation and international standards and norms conducted in 2002, UNHCR has worked closely with the GoA towards amending the 1999 Law on Refugees. As a result, a new set of amendments to the Law was adopted in early 2004 which brings it more in line with internationally recognised standards, although some gaps remain to be closed. UNHCR also assists the GoA to effectively and fairly implement the asylum system through legal capacity-building activities, jointly conducted RSD interviews, regular discussions and guidance. In this regard, increasing efforts have been put in improving the quality of the RSD procedure, the management of asylum data and the reception and management of asylum-seekers at border entry points.

With regard to the reduction of statelessness, UNHCR remains focused on ensuring the sustainability and durability of the existing facilitated procedure for naturalisation of refugees from Azerbaijan, while pursuing the improvement of the national citizenship-related legal framework in accordance with international standards. Accordingly, UNHCR's role is primarily to provide its technical advice in

interpreting, applying and amending the 1995 Law on Citizenship based on international standards and codifying the facilitated naturalisation procedure.

UNHCR continues to play an important role in facilitating the sustainable local integration of refugees in Armenia. Specifically, UNHCR has been instrumental in ensuring that refugees be included as a target group in national, bilateral and multilateral development plans and projects such as the PRSP and the UNDAF. In this regard, UNHCR's contribution has also been fundamental in instilling a rights-based approach in the elaboration of national development policies and strategies. UNHCR will intensify its efforts in developing public and private partnerships in support of the local integration of refugees consistent with its responsible phase-down strategy in material assistance. UNHCR will also remain actively engaged in advocating for the protection of the civil, political, social and economic rights of refugees within the scope of the overall improvement of the rule of law and the respect for human rights in the country.

### Overview of beneficiary populations

Below is a table providing the available breakdown of the registered refugee population in Armenia as of 31 August 2004.

Name of beneficiary population	Age group	Male	Female	Total	Percent
Refugees from AZE (Prima Facie)	5-17	8, 197	7, 874	16, 071	7%
	18-59	51, 239	57, 868	109, 107	46%
	60 and >	49, 306	61, 230	110, 536	47%
Refugees from non-CIS countries (GoA recognised)	0-4	-	-	-	
	5-17	2	0	2	
	18-59	5	2	7	
	60 and >	-	-	-	
Refugees from non-CIS countries (Mandate)	0-4	-	-	-	
	5-17	-	-	-	
	18-59	1	-	1	
	60 and >	-	-	-	
Persons with temporary asylum status	0-4	1	0	1	
	5-17	3	1	4	
	18-59	23	13	36	
	60 and >	2	1	3	
Total		108, 761	126, 989	235, 768	100%

### Linkages to other countries

UNHCR strategy in Armenia is clearly linked to the Europe Bureau's Strategic direction – 2004-2006 paper, particularly as it relates to the Eastern Europe region. UNHCR Armenia has on-going contacts with the other two Branch Offices in the South Caucasus, in Azerbaijan and in Georgia, and in co-ordination is undertaken through the regular exchange of information and sub-regional and regional meetings.

## **Capacity and presence of implementing partners**

In 2005 UNHCR plans to continue to deliver its assistance and protection activities through its established partners. UNHCR will also further continue its efforts to encourage other actors to include assistance to locally integrating refugees in their projects with the financial support from other donors. Several project activities previously funded by UNHCR with WFP, IOM, ASIF, CRS, OXFAM, UMCOR and AAA-NGO-C have already been successfully transferred and continued by them with funding from others.

UNHCR's contribution in developing and maintaining the capacity of both governmental and non-governmental implementing partners in Armenia has been significant. National NGOs that started to work on behalf of refugees dependent on UNHCR's advice and guidance are now able to manage their activities and resources effectively and deliver good quality services to the beneficiaries on their own. For example, Mission Armenia is now a direct contractor with USAID and other donors. This has allowed them to expand the scope of their assistance to refugees independently from UNHCR funds. In 2005, UNHCR will continue to implement capacity building activities to ensure the continuity of the process and the steady improvement of the performance of national governmental and non-governmental partners.

## **Co-ordination and co-operation with other UN agencies and international organisations**

There is a high level of co-ordination among the UN agencies in Armenia as well as between them and other international organisations. In 2003, the UN Country Team successfully engaged in the CCA/UNDAF exercise. The UNDAF, which will cover the five year period from 2005-2009, is a rights-based strategy for the UN system in Armenia that aims to support country level efforts to achieve national development priorities and goals included in the PRSP and the MDGs. As the refugees are among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in Armenia and since both the PRSP and the UNDAF focus on meeting the needs and alleviating the problems of the poorest segments of the society, refugees will benefit from them as well as locals. UNHCR activities are included in 21 UNDAF country programme outcomes which focus on improving the human rights and socio-economic conditions in Armenia for the most socially disadvantaged groups, including refugees. In 2005, it is expected that as a result of the UNDAF the interaction and co-operation among the UN agencies will be increased and more joint programming activities implemented.

UNHCR attends the monthly Donor Co-ordination meeting chaired on a rotating basis by UNDP, USAID and the World Bank (WB). UNHCR also participates in various Working/Theme Groups covering a diverse number of topics such as Displacement, Trafficking, Elections, Ombudsman, Rule of Law, Human Rights, HIV/AIDS, Food Security, Housing and Gender. UNHCR regularly uses these various co-ordination mechanisms to lobby for the inclusion of refugees and naturalised former refugees in the development plans and human rights projects of the other international agencies.

In 2005 UNHCR will continue to strongly advocate for the housing rights of refugees with national and international institutions as well as with donors. Evidence of the increased commitment of the GoA to the provision of shelter to refugees is the inclusion of funds equivalent to USD 5 million in the GoA's Medium-Term Expenditure Plan in 2005 and 2006 to meet this need.

**(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives**

<p><b>Beneficiary Population / Theme</b>  Further strengthening of the national asylum system in accordance with relevant international standards and norms, further reduction of statelessness and further support to the sustainable social, economic and legal local integration of refugees in Armenia.</p>	
<p><b>First Goal :</b> Further strengthening of the national asylum system in accordance with relevant international standards and norms.</p>	
<p><b>Principle Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asylum-seekers and refugees are admitted safely into Armenia.</li> <li>• Asylum-seekers and refugees benefit from the national asylum legal framework, including access to a fair, gender-sensitive and effective RSD procedure and treatment in accordance with relevant international standards and norms.</li> <li>• Persons who do not meet the criteria for refugee status as per the 1951 Convention but who are still in need of international protection are provided with temporary asylum as a complementary form of protection.</li> <li>• Asylum and refugee protection concerns are incorporated in national legislation and</li> </ul>	<p><b>Related Outputs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced training of border guards organised.</li> <li>• Referral system at the borders in place.</li> <li>• Quality of RSD procedure improved.</li> <li>• RSD procedure fairly and effectively implemented.</li> <li>• Existing system of provision of asylum data by DMR consolidated.</li> <li>• The provisions of the national legislation on granting temporary asylum as a complementary form of protection correctly and effectively implemented.</li> <li>• “Saving clauses” such as those contained in the Palermo Protocols included in existing and/or newly drafted anti-trafficking legislation.</li> <li>• The right to asylum of foreign trafficking victims identified in Armenia ensured.</li> </ul>

programmes to combat trafficking and smuggling.

**Second Goal: Further reduction of statelessness in Armenia**

**Principle Objectives**

- The national legal framework on citizenship is improved in accordance with international standards as established in the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions.
- Refugees from Azerbaijan have continued access to the facilitated procedure for the acquisition of Armenian citizenship in the process of their local integration.
- New-born children are registered in a timely manner and properly documented.

**Related Outputs**

- The 1995 Law on Citizenship amended to better reflect relevant international standards and effectively implemented.
- DMR and other relevant governmental bodies, NGOs, academics and other pertinent actors trained on citizenship and statelessness issues.
- The existing facilitated procedure codified and implemented in a fair and effective manner.
- Governmental officials, local authorities and NGO staff trained on the codified facilitated procedure.
- Refugees informed on the codified procedure and provided with targeted advice and counselling as necessary to make their free and informed choice to naturalise.
- UNHCR-UNICEF joint survey on birth registration finalised.
- Related national legislation analysed and improved.

**Third Goal:** Further support to the sustainable social, economic and legal local integration of refugees in Armenia.

<b>Principle Objectives</b>	<b>Related Outputs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships in support of local integration are further developed and implemented.</li>   <li>• Refugees in temporary accommodation have increased access to permanent and adequate housing.</li>   <li>• The housing rights of refugees are protected through strengthening of the national legal framework.</li>   <li>• Refugees have access to improved basic social services and economic opportunities.</li>   <li>• Refugees are aware of and able to effectively exercise their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugee needs in the course of local integration included in the development plans of the government, international institutions, bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors.</li> <li>• Joint programming for local integration of refugees developed and implemented within the framework of the UNDAF.</li> <li>• Permanent and adequate shelter provided to needy refugee families residing in sub-standard temporary accommodation.</li> <li>• Relevant legislation developed and implemented to provide refugees residing in communal centres with adequate legal protection from forcible eviction.</li> <li>• Study on needs of at-risk households jointly conducted with other UN agencies in the framework of the UNDAF.</li> <li>• Improved national policies on mother and child health care benefit refugees.</li> <li>• Improved national policies on the care of the elderly benefit refugees.</li> <li>• Economic opportunities for poor and socially disadvantaged refugee youth increased.</li> <li>• Information on refugee rights</li> </ul>



civil, political, social and economic rights.

disseminated through media and counselling.

- Refugee civil, political, social and economic rights protected through court representation, counselling and promotion of the rule of law.