



Eastern Europe

Recent developments

Despite intermittent and spectacular acts of violence affecting almost all republics in the region of the Northern Caucasus (southern Federal District of the Russian Federation), it appears that a consensus is emerging over the need to adopt a multidisciplinary and long-term strategy aimed at providing socio-economic progress for the benefit of the entire population. In this context, a High Level Dialogue on Human Security in the Northern Caucasus was convened in Moscow in April 2005. A first successful application to the UN Human Security Trust Fund will allow the launch of a series of pilot projects in North Ossetia and a three-year multi-agency recovery programme. This programme aims primarily to provide durable solutions to Osset refugees from Georgia but it is expected that it will have a wider scope, both territorial and sectoral, at a later stage. Through an increasing presence or at least regular monitoring missions inside the war-torn republic, UNHCR and its partners continue to assist internally displaced people from Chechnya who are either seeking local integration in Ingushetia or are willing to return to their place of origin in Chechnya.

In the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), one of UNHCR's main objectives is

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Georgia
Republic of Moldova
Russian Federation
Ukraine



to take stock of the situation and the needs of persons of concern to the Office, in order to improve and better target the provision of various services.

Located along the external eastern border of the expanded European Union, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine face common challenges with regard to establishing comprehensive migration policies, building national asylum systems in line with international standards as well as finding durable solutions for refugees including local integration. In these countries, UNHCR has embarked on the development of a subregional approach on the building of the institution of asylum. The Office has supported cross-border linkages both amongst the States of the Western Newly Independent States and between them and the European Union, in particular through the Söderköping process, which offers an integrated forum for cross-border dialogue on migration and asylum. UNHCR has also supported the efforts of the Governments in the subregion to expand their reception capacities, with funding provided by the European Commission. While appreciating that there may be certain pressures on governmental asylum capacities, UNHCR is concerned that the structural changes in Ukraine and Belarus may have affected the asylum capacity. The subregion was selected by the European Commission for a

pilot Regional Protection Programme (RPP) for 2006. Within the context of this programme, the Council noted the importance of continuing to work closely with UNHCR. The Office provided comments to the RPP and will continue to be involved in the dialogue and in the shaping of this programme at the global and subregional levels.

In Georgia, a revalidation of the registration of more than 200,000 internally displaced persons from the provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was recently completed. Much-needed attention continues to be paid to the population of Chechen refugees in Pankisi valley. UNHCR is an important player in the conflict resolution process led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Abkhazia: the Office has presented strategic considerations focusing on the district of Gali, where spontaneous returns have taken place in recent years. Prepared in coordination with key NGO partners, these considerations have been well received by the relevant parties.

In Armenia, a survey is being conducted on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals as well as a pilot census of the refugee population in one of the eleven Armenian provinces. The results will offer a picture of the needs and place of residence of all long-term refugees from Azerbaijan still in Armenia.

In Azerbaijan, UNHCR is participating in a collaborative approach with other UN agencies and has undertaken an assessment of the situation whereby a sizeable population remains internally displaced as a result of the frozen conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Office has identified ways to reinvigorate donors' and other partners' interest in ongoing and new assistance projects.

UNHCR's Bureau for Europe is completing a protection gaps analysis for the entire region in order to harmonize UNHCR activities and tackle issues that still hinder the development of asylum systems in line with the highest international norms.

Strategic objectives

Building upon an updated assessment of the needs of the populations displaced by as yet unresolved internal conflicts, UNHCR will continue to provide durable solutions to the most vulnerable categories, in particular women and children. The Office and its partners will continue to advocate the integration of the affected population into wider development policies and programmes in the framework of poverty reduction strategies. UNHCR will endeavour to bring about the adaptation of emerging national asylum systems in response to the findings of the above-mentioned protection gaps analysis.

With the increased geographical proximity to the expanded European Union, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine find themselves on one of the major migration routes. The main focus of the Office in the Western Newly Independent States will be on the strengthening of the institution of asylum. The paramount task will be to ensure that asylum-seekers, within a context of mixed migration flows, are able to find international protection. UNHCR offices in the region are working towards ensuring that asylum-seekers have access to the territories of Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and to fair, efficient and effective asylum procedures. UNHCR will continue to assist governments in the drafting of legislation compliant with international standards of protection; to ensure that the concept of subsidiary protection is properly reflected and implemented; to promote

the identification of a proper durable solution for recognized refugees and achieve a good level of understanding on and support for the plight of the refugees in the region; to advocate for the ratification of statelessness instruments and work with the authorities in order to ensure that statelessness is reduced; and to cooperate closely with the European Union, in particular in contributing to the Söderköping process and to the dialogue on RPP.

Activities in the Western Newly Independent States will continue to be overseen by the UNHCR Regional Representation in Ukraine supervising national UNHCR Representations in Belarus and the Republic of Moldova.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in the **Russian Federation** are described in a separate chapter. The following paragraphs cover operations in the rest of Eastern Europe.

In **Armenia**, the Office intends to pursue a census exercise started in 2005 to attain a broader statistical database on people of concern to UNHCR. A survey on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) amongst refugees and the local population is expected to shed more light on the situation in Armenia. The census data and survey findings will enable UNHCR to reorient its operations to the specific needs of vulnerable sub-groups wherever necessary. UNHCR remains committed to completing its shelter programme in the coming two years. Together with one of its partners, the Office will continue to address protection gaps identified during this year's extensive analysis.

Although it has dwindling resources at its disposal in **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR remains committed to playing an active advocacy role on behalf of the internally displaced population. Together with governmental and non-governmental actors, the Office will look into renewed ways to provide support to a frustrated population facing a protracted and increasingly untenable situation of displacement. Depending on the results of ongoing



Russian Federation, Republic of Ingushetia: A displaced Chechen and her daughter thank UNHCR for the construction materials they received. *UNHCR / V. Soboleva*

negotiations led by the Minsk Group under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), limited returns to parts of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan could be contemplated, triggering the need for additional resources.

At the same time, UNHCR will have to focus its limited resources on its core mandate group of beneficiaries, mostly Chechen refugees in Baku, who are attempting to survive in a harsh urban environment with little expectation of national institutional support beyond life-saving medical care and primary education. Prospects for resettlement of the most vulnerable amongst this population are dwindling and there is little likelihood of local integration.

In **Belarus**, UNHCR will continue to offer its expertise to the Government to bring the national legislation in line with international standards relating to refugees. The Office will continue to support the Government in its efforts to increase

the reception capacity. With local integration being the most viable solution for the majority of refugees in Belarus, UNHCR will focus on the development of activities aiming at the improvement of integration opportunities. The Office will focus its advocacy efforts on promoting access of refugees to national welfare system. UNHCR will also strive to further develop partnerships with other actors involved in development, such as UNDP.

In **Georgia**, UNHCR remains involved in one of the most complex operational environments in Europe, where solutions still need to be found for two distinct categories of internally displaced people (from Abkhazia and from South Ossetia) and a population of more than 2,000 Chechen refugees. Simultaneously, the building of a national asylum system will be pursued with the competent authorities.

UNHCR will whenever possible support limited returns to South Ossetia, either from Georgia proper or from the Russian Federation, despite a

context of persistent tension. Throughout 2005, hopes have emerged regarding the negotiating process relating to Abkhazia, with the resumption of fruitful discussions between the parties to the conflict, supported by the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General and within the Sochi forum. UNHCR is regularly invited to participate in these roundtables and intends to continue its active participation. A range of confidence-building activities has been designed under the leadership of UNHCR in an attempt to facilitate the coexistence of communities separated by the war in Abkhazia, specifically in the district of Gali, which used to be populated by a majority of ethnic Georgians. Those activities constitute new strategic considerations regarding UNHCR's involvement in the Abkhazia situation: while endorsed by all relevant parties to the peace process, they could not be included in the restricted budgetary envelope for 2006. In order to implement those additional activities, UNHCR in Georgia will need additional funds.

In the **Republic of Moldova**, UNHCR will continue to assist the Government in building its asylum system by offering legal advice and capacity-building support with a particular emphasis on improving and implementing national asylum legislation. Capacity-building activities, however, are not limited to Government authorities but also include civil society actors involved with asylum-seekers and refugees. The Office will continue to support directly a number of destitute urban refugees and to work towards the further development of an integration strategy for refugees. UNHCR will enhance its cooperation with UN agencies in the Republic of Moldova, the OSCE, the European Union and other international actors.

In **Ukraine**, UNHCR will continue to support capacity-building activities targeting the authorities and NGOs dealing with refugee issues. The Office's emphasis will continue to be on development of legislation, establishment of a fair and efficient refugee status determination and adoption of measures aiming at the local integration of refugees. Resettlement will be sought for selected beneficiaries. The Office will continue its advocacy for the accession of Ukraine to the international statelessness instruments. UNHCR will continue building partnerships with actors involved in sustainable development, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process. Having assumed the regional functions, UNHCR in Ukraine will continue to take the lead in developing a coherent subregional approach by Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine on the development of harmonized asylum systems.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme Budget
Armenia	1,535,176
Azerbaijan	3,564,813
Belarus	1,054,028
Georgia	4,304,911
Republic of Moldova	624,950
Russian Federation	15,609,817
Ukraine	3,054,883
Regional activities ¹	195,000
Total	29,943,578

¹ Includes regional activities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as scholarships for refugee students.