

# Georgia

## Main Objectives

- Protect and assist Chechen refugees and support the Government in implementing the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.
- Support the conflict-resolution process sponsored by the OSCE in Georgia/South Ossetia and facilitate the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons from South Ossetia and Georgia proper.
- Support the conflict-resolution process sponsored by the UN in Georgia/Abkhazia; draw upon the Georgian Self-Reliance Fund to seek durable solutions for IDPs by promoting integration in their current places of residence (without prejudice to their eventual return); monitor spontaneous return to Gali District and provide limited material assistance.
- Seek improvements to the refugee law and asylum procedures and help the Government and NGO structures build up sufficient resources and expertise to respond to involuntary displacement; promote accession to the conventions relating to statelessness.



## PLANNING FIGURES

Population	Jan. 2002	Dec. 2002
Chechen Refugees	8,000	8,000
Returnees and IDPs (Georgian-Osset conflict) <sup>1,2</sup>	60,000	60,000
Returnees and IDPs (Georgian-Abkhaz conflict) <sup>1</sup>	265,500	265,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>333,000</b>	<b>333,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation.

<sup>2</sup> Includes refugees in North Ossetia (Russian Federation) who may not be able to integrate locally and may return.

**TOTAL REQUIREMENTS • USD 5,365,825**

## WORKING ENVIRONMENT

### Recent Developments

Georgia acceded to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in 1999. However, asylum practice remains limited since Georgia is not an attractive country for asylum-seekers. Improvement of national refugee legislation and the asylum system is needed in order to bring these into line with international standards, and currently, the resources to do so are insufficient. UNHCR continues to assist the Government, both directly and in co-operation with other partners, in building capacities for asylum and refugee management.

UNHCR, OSCE, the Council of Europe (CoE) and other organisations have advocated for solutions to statelessness, property restitution, return of the formerly deported Meskhetians and guarantees of their human rights. Despite their concerted efforts, the expected amendments of relevant legislation and by-laws have yet to be introduced.

The prospect for safe return and integration of refugees and displaced populations remains bleak amidst continued conflict and low security. Due to continued instability and armed clashes, voluntary repatriation of some 8,000 refugees from

Chechnya (Russian Federation), who have arrived in Georgia since 1999, has not been feasible. In addition to its core protection functions, UNHCR is assisting the Government in the areas of relief, shelter and capacity-building.

Secessionist conflicts at the beginning of the 1990s have led Abkhazia and South Ossetia to declare themselves autonomous entities, and have resulted in the displacement of more than 300,000 persons. A significant number of persons remain displaced within Georgia or in other countries, mainly in the Russian Federation, due to the continued stalemate of conflict resolution processes.

Despite the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, OSCE, the “Friends of Georgia”, and other parties, to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Georgia-Abkhaz conflict, the Co-ordinating Council has not met since October 2000. In November 2000, a Joint Assessment Mission (CoE, EU, OSCE, ICRC) to Gali District under the aegis of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was undertaken. UNHCR participated in the assessment mission as an observer. The recommendations of the mission aimed at facilitating the stay and protection of human rights of some 40,000 people who had returned to Gali spontaneously. However, none of these recommendations have yet been implemented.

On 22 September 2001, a Joint Control Commission meeting (JCC) under the auspices of the OSCE over power-sharing in South-Ossetia did not result in any breakthrough. No significant progress on return of refugees and IDPs has been witnessed.

## Constraints

In addition to political deadlock over the above-mentioned conflicts, the increased security risks are a major cause of concern. Fighting erupted several times during the year between Georgian partisans/militia groups and Abkhaz units, in particular in the Kodori Gorge where, in October 2001, a UNOMIG helicopter was shot down and nine UNOMIG staff lost their lives. Frequent threats of abduction of staff in Pankisi, common crime and corruption and land-mines render operations physically risky and hamper protection interventions and access to refugees, IDPs and returnees. Due to threats, UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies had to intermittently suspend monitoring activities by international staff in Pankisi Valley (where Chechen refugees reside). Despite this, regular basic assistance was provided during the year 2001. In late 2000, the Head of UNHCR's field office in South Ossetia, and in 2001, the Head of the field office in Ahmeta, had to be evacuated following security threats. The pace of return to places of origin also remains very limited as mass return is linked to the improvement of the economy, safety and security, political guarantees and property restitution. These conditions also impact on the extent of UNHCR's involvement.

# STRATEGY

## Protection and Solutions

For a number of years, UNHCR has been supporting the Government, national institutions, NGOs and civil society to address complex human displacements in Georgia. In 2002, UNHCR will aim to consolidate efforts to build adequate asylum structures and to strengthen their sustainability, by facilitating and providing expertise through training, lobbying, providing comments on legal drafts, participation in meetings, advocacy for establishing efficient and fair procedures for the determination of refugee status, upgrading the reliability of registration systems, in particular for the Chechen refugees. Dissemination of information and raising public awareness, such as through the media, roundtables and informal contacts, are key factors.

Since voluntary repatriation of Chechen refugees is primarily dependent upon improved security conditions in Chechnya, return cannot be promoted at this stage. UNHCR will continue to inform refugees and local authorities about its policy on voluntary, safe, and dignified return to enable the refugees to make informed decisions on return, and to ensure that the authorities maintain their commitment to *non-refoulement*. Should the refugees' stay be prolonged further, UNHCR and the Government might explore possibilities for extending to refugees the benefits of self-reliance measures.

UNHCR will work to reduce statelessness through Georgia's accession to the 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness, and by bringing the national citizenship law and procedures in line with international standards. With regards to Meskhetians who were expelled during the Second World War, current laws are insufficient to grant full citizenship through a simplified procedure. UNHCR, in consultations with the CoE, NGOs and the Government, is promoting legal regulations and other measures for addressing the principle of the right of return. However, the right of return should not stop the pursuit of solutions for Meskhetians in their current countries of residence.

UNHCR will also continue to support and complement international and national efforts for addressing displacement issues and for supporting peace processes. With regard to the Georgian-Osset conflict, UNHCR is monitoring the condition of refugees and IDPs, particularly their protection, and, together with OSCE, CoE, the authorities and local communities, is advocating for their right to return, within the framework of the OSCE-led process of conflict resolution. However, in view of the very limited number of returns in the last few years, the UNHCR staff involved in these operations will be reduced in 2002. With regard to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, UNHCR is a signatory to the 1994 Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation. It is participating in the

peace process under the auspices of the UN-led process of conflict resolution, while advocating for the right to voluntary return in safety and dignity.

In collaboration with UNDP, the World Bank and other organisations, UNHCR promotes the full implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a solution for the majority of IDPs, particularly those from beyond Gali District who have not been able to return to their homes. This will enable recognition of the social, economic and political rights of these IDPs as citizens of Georgia, without relinquishing their right to return to their places of origin when conditions permit.

## Assistance

Given the limited resources available to the Government, Chechen refugees and their host communities, UNHCR assistance has supported the improvement of living conditions of the most vulnerable persons, particularly those who live in communal centres, through shelter renovation, psycho-social support, community development assistance and child care facilities. In 2002, UNHCR's assistance and protection will continue to be provided to the refugees in Pankisi Valley as long as the security situation permits. Since 80 per cent of the refugees are residing with Georgian host families, UNHCR will closely monitor host family-refugee relations, and provide targeted assistance when needed to ensure that the burden on the host families remains bearable. In addition, support will be extended to the wider community to limit as much as possible potential tensions between the refugees and host communities,

through education, health and community development programmes, food for host families and other measures. It is important to avoid dependency on outside assistance and to preserve a balanced co-existence between the communities. However, security in the Valley is volatile and there is a significant risk of abduction. UNHCR must keep the security of its own staff in mind while trying to improve the protection of the refugees. Contingency plans with regard to the situation in the northern Caucasus will be reviewed on a regular basis and kept updated.

In South Ossetia, given the prevailing operational environment and very minor returnee movements, UNHCR's direct involvement will be reduced in 2002 and covered from Tbilisi. Support and assistance provisions will include limited return packages, shelter repairs, counselling and legal representations in court when returnees present their case for the return of property in their places of origin.

In 2001, based on the recommendations of the Joint Assessment Mission to Gali District, and in view of the acute needs and precarious security in the District, UNHCR restarted carefully measured interventions to assist the spontaneously returned population with minor school repairs, household items, materials such as seeds, as well as protection monitoring. It is intended that such interventions should not concentrate solely on Gali but that they must also benefit the Sukhumi area. This approach will be undertaken with due caution and will be regularly reassessed. Activities will be undertaken in consultation and collaboration with the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Georgia, the "Friends of Georgia"

and other partners, in order to devise measured and coherent interventions. More substantial assistance within the area will be developed only when the political situation has improved. If the October 2001 events in the Kodori Gorge result in a major population outflow from Abkhazia, UNHCR might extend assistance to the Zugdidi area following an assessment of needs.

Since 1999, UNHCR has been actively participating in the Brooking Process that promotes a collaborative approach amongst UNHCR, UNDP and the World Bank. In Georgia, it aims at the smooth transition from humanitarian aid to more sustainable development for IDPs in what is, in effect, a frozen conflict. UNHCR was instrumental in this process and provided support to the "New Approach" and the implementation of the Georgian Self Reliance Fund for the Development of IDPs (GSRF),

Many IDPs from Abkhazia in Zugdidi are accommodated in rehabilitated communal buildings. *UNHCR/A. Hollmann.*



through financial and technical support, participation in project selection and monitoring, and lobbying for additional donations from other sources. In 2002, UNHCR will also maintain its efforts and advocate for the realisation of the rights of IDPs as citizens of Georgia through the New Approach and GSRF.

### Desired Impact

UNHCR's support should lead to a solid and efficient national asylum system and enhanced governmental capacity for the management of population displacement. The provision of expert advice will enable the Government to amend its national legislation and ratify the conventions on statelessness, which would be of particular benefit to Meskhetians. The participation of UNHCR in the peace process through the Co-ordinating Council for Abkhazia and Joint Coordinating Council for South Ossetia permits UNHCR to promote safe and voluntary return of IDPs to their places of original residence in the various regions (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia proper) and to help returnees to reintegrate. Chechen refugees, unable to return to their homeland, will continue to receive assistance and asylum, while their burden on host families and the wider community will be mitigated through UNHCR's assistance.

## ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Management Structure

UNHCR in Georgia will function with ten international staff, 36 national staff, one JPO, and four UNVs. Due to the lack of significant progress on conflict resolution; developments and constraints in the operational environment; the security situation; and the results of UNHCR's Action 2 in 2001, the staffing and field office structures will be streamlined. In 2002, two mobile protection teams, one for western Georgia and another for the refugee operation in the east of the country will take up their functions, operating out of an administrative hub. Each Mobile Team will consist of a Head, two field officers or UNVs and three to four local staff in each hub. The South-Ossetia operation will be covered from the office in Tbilisi. This approach offers an efficient and flexible staff deployment framework.

### Co-ordination

UNHCR will closely consult and co-ordinate its activities with its partners, the Government, CoE, OSCE/ODHIR, ICRC, UNDP, IOM and other partners, in addressing human displacement within the framework of the 2000 Geneva Conference (the follow up to the 1996 CIS Conference). Being a partner in the UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordination Structure, UNHCR continues to play an active role in infor-

mation-sharing and liaising with other constituents regarding its plans and activities. UNHCR continues to lead the humanitarian operation for the assistance to Chechen refugees in close co-operation with the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, as requested by the Georgian Government through a Presidential Decree.

### OFFICES

Tbilisi  
Akhmeta

### PARTNERS

#### Government Agencies

Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation  
South Ossetian Committee on Migration and Nationalities

#### NGOs

*Acción Contra el Hambre*  
Agency for Community Rehabilitation and Social Development  
Charity Humanitarian Centre "Abkhazeti"  
International Rescue Committee  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
Peace and Accord  
Samani  
United Nations Association of Georgia  
Women Aid International (Georgia)

#### Others

UNVs

### BUDGET (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,316,168
Community Services	350,000
Domestic Needs	155,000
Education	100,000
Food	75,000
Forestry	30,000
Health	200,000
Income Generation	245,000
Legal Assistance	230,000
Livestock	80,000
Operational Support (to Agencies)	344,000
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	636,000
Transport/Logistics	200,000
Water	30,000
<b>Total Operations</b>	<b>3,991,168</b>
Programme Support	1,374,657
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,365,825</b>