

COUNTRY OPERATION

G E O R G I A

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Assist returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the Georgian-Osset conflict; support the conflict-resolution process sponsored by the OSCE; advise the local authorities dealing with reintegration of ethnic minorities; repair the homes of returnees, schools, clinics and communal buildings; support income-generation activities; support the Georgian-Abkhaz process of conflict-resolution sponsored by the UN; assist IDPs through advocacy of their rights and income-generating projects; monitor the security of persons returning spontaneously to Gali district; help improve national refugee legislation and the implementation of the 1951 Convention through training, administrative support and public awareness campaigns; help develop a legal framework for the repatriation and integration of formerly deported Meskhetians; and provide protection and assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, including those from Chechnya.

Impact

- Georgia's accession in 1999 to the 1951 Convention, as a result of UNHCR's advocacy work with the Georgian authorities, had an immediate impact on Chechen asylum-seekers, all of whom received refugee status.
- UNHCR protected over 5,000 Chechen refugees, and helped them to pass the winter without undue hardship.
- UNHCR's protection and assistance programme encouraged more refugees and IDPs to repatriate and allowed returnees to reintegrate more rapidly. A further 270 refugees repatriated and IDPs returned to their places of origin in South Ossetia and Georgia proper. The protection function of UNHCR Mobile Teams had a stabilizing effect in areas of conflict.
- A large numbers of IDPs decreased their dependence on external assistance through UNHCR-supported income-generation projects, including revolving loan schemes.

Persons of Concern

MAIN REFUGEE ORIGIN/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Russian Federation (Chechen Refugees)	5,200	5,200	54	22
Other Refugees	19	1	63	5
Returned in 1999*	270	270	-	-
IDPs	279,210	90,000	55	28

* In addition, some 1,350 persons returned in 1998

Income and Expenditure - SP Activities (USD)

WORKING BUDGET	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS*	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
9,059,661	2,403,563	4,291,998	6,695,561	6,408,977

* Includes contributions earmarked for the Special Programme in the CIS countries.

** Includes opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

Following Georgia's independence in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, conflicts over South Ossetia and Abkhazia displaced about 50,000 Ossets and 270,000 Georgians. UNHCR first worked in Georgia in 1993, delivering emergency assistance to IDPs fleeing to government-controlled areas. Thereafter, it concentrated on improving conditions for them (shelter, health, education and income-generation) and assisting spontaneous returnees in Gali. In 1996, the programme shifted to supporting the Government's reconciliation efforts through repatriation (and then assistance) to areas of former conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while maintaining some activities for IDPs in western Georgia. Some 1,600 refugees and IDPs have returned to South Ossetia or to government-controlled areas. In view of the situation in Chechnya, and anticipating a possible spillover into Georgia, UNHCR, UNDP, ICRC and the Government prepared a contingency plan to receive, accommodate and assist refugees. Some 5,200 Chechen refugees sought asylum in Georgia during the last three months of the year, at Akhmeta in the Pankisi Valley. UNHCR was able to extend protection and to address their immediate needs. (Please refer also to section on the "Chechnya Emergency".)

Constraints

The country suffered an increase in criminal activity, which at times reduced UNHCR's mobility and access. A staff member was wounded in an ambush on a UNHCR vehicle in Gali. By the end of the year only national staff remained stationed in Abkhazia. In South Ossetia, criminals also began to target international organisations. Partially as a result of security concerns, international staff had relocated to Gori, in Georgia proper, by the end of the year. When Chechen refugees started arriving in the Akhmeta area, winter had already set in and access to the border valley, and implementation of shelter activities, became difficult. There was no progress in resolving the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, nor in obtaining guarantees of the security of returnees.

Funding

A shortfall in funding of the Special Programme for the CIS was partially offset by slower than expected voluntary repatriation from the Russian Federation. UNHCR was able to cover emergency assistance for refugees arriving from Chechnya out of Special Programme funds without resorting to the Emergency Fund.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

Georgia's accession to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol in May was a major development, made possible by close co-operation between UNHCR and other partners involved in training and advocacy, such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and NGOs. Subsequent discussions with the Government focused on improving current refugee legislation and the ratification of international instruments related to statelessness.

Chechens seeking asylum in Georgia were the first to benefit from Georgia's accession to the 1951 Convention. Although this group was of the same ethnic origin as the local population in the Pankisi Valley, its arrival heightened security concerns in the area. It also put a severe strain on local resources, both public and private, because of the number of refugees, which was equal to that of the local population. These factors rendered the protection of the refugees particularly sensitive. UNHCR staff and officials of the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) worked closely together in the region on registration and on-the-job training on protection issues. Some Chechen refugees preferred to return to the Russian Federation and UNHCR monitored these movements (in co-ordination with the office in Vladikavkaz).

In April, Georgia also joined the Council of Europe, a move that should pave the way for the repatriation of formerly deported Meskhetians, one of the conditions attached to membership. The Office continued to assist the authorities in the development of a legal framework for formerly deported peoples, including the right to return to Georgia and the right to citizenship.

IDPs from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone remained affected by the political stalemate: only two meetings of the Georgian-Abkhaz Co-ordinating Council were held in 1999. Although UN-sponsored proximity talks continued to strengthen confidence between the two sides, no progress was made towards a political solution which would permit assisted repatriation.

In 1999, 270 refugees and IDPs from the Georgian-Osset conflict returned to their home, bringing the total since 1998 to some 1,600 persons. Of these, 410 refugees returned from the Russian Federation to South Ossetia and Georgia proper, while 750 IDPs returned within South Ossetia, and 415 IDPs to and within Georgia proper. UNHCR organised convoys from

North Ossetia for 360 returnees. The presence in the area of a UNHCR Mobile Team was often referred to as having helped to stabilize local conditions.

UNHCR advised the Government on its long-term strategies for the protection of persons of concern, including the important issue of restitution of property to returnees. With UNDP and the World Bank, the Office began to advocate the political, social and economic rights of IDPs from Abkhazia, and a gradual transition from humanitarian assistance to development and self-sufficiency, without prejudice to their eventual return home. This became known as the "New Approach" to internal displacement. UNHCR also briefed government departments on migration issues, including MRA, the State Border Defence Department and local bodies. Efforts to help NGOs acquire more experience and independence continued through training, the selection of implementing partners, networking, etc. Some of these activities were covered from allocations from the CIS NGO Fund.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: UNHCR continued to support the UNV children's magazine, White Crane, (also distributed in Armenia) which promotes reconciliation between ethnic groups in conflict. With UNHCR's support, UNV organised its third summer camp for Georgian, South Ossetian, Abkhaz, Armenian and Azeri children. Camp activities were underpinned by a philosophy of peace education, and social and psychological guidance. Several youth centres in the Tskhinvali/Gori area received funding for repairs. Local NGOs were helped to organise communities receiving reconstruction and repair kits, in order to motivate the various population groups to participate as fully as possible in activities built around reconciliation. In western Georgia, an international NGO received support for its work with Georgian IDP children and adolescents, helping to integrate socially through informal educational and social activities.

Crop Production: In western Georgia, UNHCR assisted an NGO to rent land on a long lease and to run agricultural co-operatives for the benefit of, and gradual take-over by IDPs. Through the distribution of seeds and through agricultural-skills training, the project improved the economic self-sufficiency, especially food-security, of 400 beneficiaries who would otherwise not have access to farmland.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: A total of 350 Osset returnee and vulnerable IDP families in South Ossetia received a total of 85 stoves and 1,000 m³ of firewood to help them through the winter. Some 5,200 Chechen refugees who arrived in mid-winter were given immediate support in the form of plastic sheeting, wood stoves, firewood, mattresses, kitchen utensils, blankets and soap.

Education: Schools in the Pankisi valley received school supplies for Chechen refugee children, such as textbooks, blackboards and some stationery. With UNHCR support, nine schools were fully rehabilitated in South Ossetia and ten schools in Georgia proper, benefiting a total of 4,411 children, thus better preparing IDPs should conditions for return to their places of origin improve.

Food: UNHCR purchased and distributed basic food items, such as wheat, vegetable oil and sugar, to meet the immediate needs of some 5,200 Chechen refugees in the Pankisi Valley during the last quarter of the year. UNHCR also distributed food donated by WFP.

Health/Nutrition: Under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and in collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF and USAID, UNHCR co-funded a nation-wide survey on reproductive health, with special emphasis on IDPs. The survey, the first on reproductive health in Georgia, was implemented by the National Centre for Disease Control and will be completed in 2000. A WHO Emergency Health Kit was procured to strengthen health services for Chechen refugees and the local population. For Osset returnees and IDPs, UNHCR funded reproductive, and general health education programmes, also designed to increase awareness of state and NGO health services. Five village health posts in South Ossetia were rehabilitated and equipped. An international NGO trained the local health authorities, stressing a self-help approach through local health brigades. In western Georgia, UNHCR assisted a local NGO, which had taken over from an international NGO, specialised in emergency health services. It also worked with state health care institutions on ways to deliver better health care services to Georgian nationals in the region, including IDPs.

Income Generation: Returnees to South Ossetia and Georgia proper received small workshop kits, or agricultural kits, and training in their use, to help raise their income. In return, beneficiaries were required to render free services to vulnerable persons. In western

Georgia, UNHCR supported an international NGO implementing an income-generation and small-business assistance project, targeting vulnerable Georgian IDPs residing in communal centres. In Tbilisi, 4,642 women, of whom 70 per cent were IDPs, received group loans under a revolving loan scheme supported by UNHCR. Two loan schemes were evaluated by a consultant and the resulting recommendations will be incorporated during 2000.

Legal Assistance: UNHCR employed a legal consultant to advise the authorities in South Ossetia on setting up a legal framework to facilitate the repatriation process. A local NGO reviewed legislation in areas of return, to ensure that returnees to government-controlled areas enjoyed their rights under national law. It also participated, at UNHCR's invitation, in international training courses. On behalf of UNHCR, the NGO also conducted training of local officials involved with protection issues. The UN Association of Georgia published its bi-monthly bulletin on matters of concern to refugees and IDPs, including reports on relevant Government, UN and NGO activities.

Operational Support (to Agencies): UNHCR helped MRA to set up a presence in the Pankisi Valley and respond to the influx of Chechen refugees by contributing vehicles, telecommunication and registration equipment. UNHCR covered up to five per cent of the overhead costs of its international implementing partners.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: Although the shelter available to Chechen refugees was often sub-standard, severe winter conditions had unfortunately isolated the Pankisi valley, forcing the postponement of repairs until 2000. Chechens were therefore accommodated with host families and in rented communal buildings. For returnees to South Ossetia and Georgia proper, UNHCR rehabilitated over 170 houses, damaged during the conflict or which had become derelict while empty. The repair, requiring 2,000 m³ of timber, was facilitated by a self-help approach, except for vulnerable families, who benefited from community participation with NGO supervision. This self-help approach also served the purpose of community-building, which is important in the fractured communities of post-conflict zones. In Tbilisi, UNHCR helped MRA repair a dormitory housing IDPs left homeless when their former host families were unable to extend further hospitality. A UNV engineer supervised UNHCR shelter activities in the country.

Transport/Logistics: Relief supplies for refugees from Chechnya were transported to Akhmeta where UNHCR rented a warehouse. A total of 1,000 Chechens was transported to Akhmeta by helicopter during December, when the roads were closed due to snow. To support repatriation to South Ossetia and government-controlled regions, UNHCR transported construction materials, rented warehouse space, and paid for fuel and spare parts for trucks.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

The office operated with 15 international staff (including a JPO, a Regional Telecommunications Officer and a Field Safety Advisor), two UNVs, as well as 49 national staff. A Mobile Team, based initially in Tskhinvali and subsequently in Gori, covered repatriation, needs assessments, assistance and monitoring in South Ossetia and in government-controlled returnee areas. Beginning in November, a second team operated out of Akhmeta in the Pankisi Valley, to monitor the protection of refugees from Chechnya, identify needs and co-ordinate the provision and distribution of emergency assistance.

Working with Others

UNHCR worked closely with the Government, UN agencies, NGOs, ICRC and bilateral donors. At the same time it participated actively in the co-ordination mechanisms overseen by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator, and in sectoral inter-agency bodies. In the context of conflict-resolution processes, a constructive dialogue was maintained with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, OSCE and UNOMIG. Excellent inter-agency co-operation was evident in the so-called "New Approach", a coalition of UNDP, the World Bank, OCHA, bilateral donors, UNHCR and the Government, to shift resources from humanitarian to development programmes and to mobilise additional funds. This planned transition does not deprive IDPs of the option to return to their places of origin when security conditions allow. The UNHCR office in Vladikavkaz assisted with the repatriation of Osset refugees from North Ossetia (Russian Federation) to Georgia.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Georgia's ratification of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol was the major development of the year.

Progress was made in practical implementation of the Convention, as witnessed by the Government of Georgia taking full responsibility for registration and determination of the status of more than 5,000 refugees from Chechnya at the end of the year. The Council of Europe, the OSCE and other organisations actively contributed to the accession process through training activities and advocacy. The formerly deported Meskhetians remained high on the agenda of OSCE, the Council of Europe and UNHCR, as well as the Government.

Although IDP participation in the political, economic and social life of the country has been limited, legal assistance and public awareness initiatives throughout the year helped to sensitise the Georgian Government and society to their presence and their rights. The process of finding a durable solution for the IDPs from the Abkhaz conflict zone did not advance. However, the organised as well as spontaneous repatriation of Osset refugees and IDPs to their homes, reflected trust that a solution to the former conflict is within reach. At the local level, some headway was made in solving the thorny issue of the restitution of property. UNHCR continued to assist the Georgian Government in developing national legislation, which will ensure fair and

efficient refugee status determination procedures, and protection for persons of concern to the Office.

Offices

Tbilisi
Gali
Sukhumi
Zugdidi

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation
Ministry of Internal Affairs
South Ossetian Committee on Migration and Nationality

NGO

Acción Contra el Hambre
Agency for Social, Economic and Cultural Development
Constanta
Dawn Foundation
ERA
Georgia Young Lawyers Association
International Rescue Committee
Migrant
Norwegian Refugee Council
Samani
Secours populaire français

Other

United Nations Association of Georgia
United Nations Volunteers



Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects*		Prior Years' Projects*	
	Special Programmes	Total	Special Programmes	Total
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	2,201,110	2,201,110	47,035	47,035
Community Services	205,968	205,968	162,839	162,839
Crop Production	131,113	131,113	68,520	68,520
Domestic Needs / Household Support	145,371	145,371	0	0
Education	3,313	3,313	316,807	316,807
Food	60,782	60,782	0	0
Stet	93,722	93,722	282,310	282,310
Stet	362,012	362,012	231,434	231,434
Legal Assistance	119,557	119,557	122,763	122,763
Operational Support (to Agencies)	151,795	151,795	169,518	169,518
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	871,178	871,178	2,033,317	2,033,317
Transport / Logistics	169,033	169,033	25,950	25,950
Instalments with Implementing Partners	927,128	927,128	(3,411,243)	(3,411,243)
Sub - total Operational	5,442,084	5,442,084	49,251	49,251
Administrative Support	637,329	637,329	110	110
Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries	6,079,413	6,079,413	49,361	49,361
Unliquidated Obligations	329,564	329,564	0	0
TOTAL	6,408,977	6,408,977	49,361	49,361
Instalments with Implementing Partners				
Payments Made	2,683,950	2,683,950	20,001	20,001
Reporting Received	1,756,821	1,756,821	3,431,244	3,431,244
Balance	927,128	927,128	(3,411,243)	(3,411,243)
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	3,555,649	3,555,649
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	144,405	144,405
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0	0
Outstanding 31 December	927,128	927,128	0	0
Unliquidated Obligations				
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	657,331	657,331
New Obligations	6,408,977	6,408,977	0	0
Disbursements	6,079,413	6,079,413	49,361	49,361
Cancellations	0	0	607,970	607,970
Outstanding 31 December	329,564	329,564	0	0

* There was no General Programme expenditure in Georgia.