



Eastern Europe

Major developments

In 2003, UNHCR continued – sometimes in very difficult security conditions – to look for ways of functioning constructively in the midst of a number of conflicts, some already deadlocked for years, while at the same time increasing its focus on the building of asylum systems in environments that remain fragile.

In the Russian Federation, UNHCR continued to strive to build the capacity of the governmental authorities responsible for asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons, but made some progress.

In the Southern Caucasus, a major political development in Georgia towards the end of 2003 triggered renewed hopes for the resolution of the political deadlock in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Earlier in the year a profiling of Chechen refugees in Georgia's Pankisi Valley considerably reduced tensions there.

The impending enlargement of the European Union highlighted the need to strengthen the national asylum systems of Western CIS countries (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine), that will find themselves at

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Georgia
Republic of Moldova
Russian Federation
Ukraine



the doorstep of the EU as of May 2004. UNHCR attaches great importance to promoting sub-regional and regional cooperation and was encouraged by the level of cross-border dialogue between these States and the acceding and candidate EU States. Migration, asylum and border officials from ten countries on both sides of the new external EU border are participating in the Söderköping cross-border cooperation initiative.

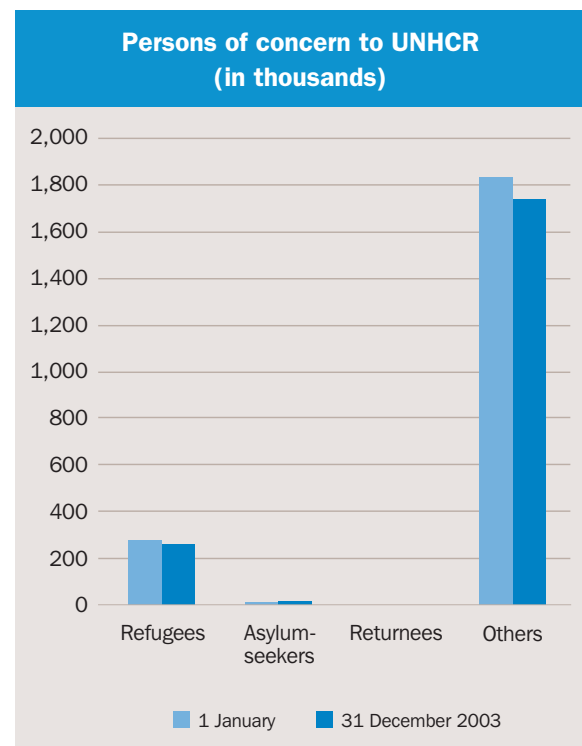
At the end of 2003, UNHCR resumed preparations for a high-level review meeting to assess the follow-up to the 1996 regional conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the CIS and relevant neighbouring States. The meeting is now planned for the end of May 2004 and will be held in Minsk, Belarus.

Challenges and concerns

In Armenia and Azerbaijan, large populations of IDPs and refugees remain displaced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that raged between the two countries. UNHCR's task has been to tackle a wide range of issues affecting these populations, while assisting both countries to build their national asylum systems. The immediate problems posed by the IDP and refugee populations make it difficult for either

country to concentrate on building a national asylum system that meets international standards.

In the Western CIS, while refugees are granted basic social and economic rights under the national refugee laws in some of the countries, their integration and self-reliance remain a challenge. The funding shortfall continued to affect operations there.



Progress towards solutions

In Georgia, a profiling exercise of the Chechen refugees in the Pankisi valley has reduced tension and successfully contributed to defining a range of durable solutions. As part of the OSCE-sponsored Joint Control Commission in South Ossetia, UNHCR is closely involved in the conflict-resolution process there. In 2003, progress was made towards the return of Ossetian IDPs from Georgia proper and within South Ossetia.

During 2003, UNHCR made considerable progress in highlighting the Government of Azerbaijan's responsibilities as a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and helping to establish a governmental refugee status determination unit, thereby placing the onus on the authorities to start operating a national refugee status determination procedure and to implement the Convention.

In Armenia, UNHCR took an active part in the drafting of the UNDAF, under which refugees are among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and are therefore more likely to benefit from projects aimed at combating poverty and income inequality, improving access to social services, strengthening governance and supporting environmentally sustainable development.

To improve the coordination of activities in the Western CIS subregion within the Söderköping process, the Cross-Border Cooperation Process Secretariat was established and became operational in 2003 with the support of the European Commission. It is based in Kyiv on the UNHCR premises and managed in cooperation with IOM and the Swedish Migration Board. Under the framework of the Secretariat, various activities took place including conferences, steering committee meetings, networking, sharing of best practices and information.

In a joint sub-regional effort, UNHCR in Moldova and Ukraine initiated activities in partnership with the European Commission's technical assistance programme for the region (TACIS) to strengthen reception facilities as well as the capacity of governments to address asylum issues. In Ukraine, UNHCR initiated activities to support the Government to develop refugee status determination hubs in regions with the highest number of asylum-seekers and refugees (Kyiv, Odessa, Zakarpatye). Construction work began on temporary accommodation



Azerbaijan: Here, two IDP girls who live in a disused railway carriage are washing their clothes. UNHCR/V. Abdusalimov

centres in Odessa and Zakarpatye (to be completed in 2004). In Moldova, some forty asylum-seekers have already been accommodated in the first newly renovated blocks of the accommodation centre.

In view of the expansion of the EU, UNHCR decided to strengthen its regional representation in Ukraine, to enable it to coordinate all UNHCR activities in the Western CIS countries.

Operations

UNHCR operations in the **Russian Federation** are described separately in the next chapter.

In **Armenia**, UNHCR concentrated on the search for durable solutions for those who had become refugees as a result of the still unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. UNHCR focused its material assistance on meeting the basic needs of the most vulnerable refugees living in communal centres. This targeted assistance included health care, social support, vocational training and community empowerment as well as the provision of improved shelter to

extremely vulnerable refugees living in sub-standard temporary accommodation.

The trend towards integration was facilitated by the Government, which, with the support of UNHCR, has established an effective and simplified mechanism for the naturalization of refugees from Azerbaijan. UNHCR successfully advocated the inclusion of refugees as a beneficiary group in the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). This was reflected in the PRS paper adopted by the Government of Armenia. UNHCR has also continued to support the further improvement and strengthening of the Armenian national asylum system.

In **Azerbaijan**, working in complex political and economic conditions, UNHCR managed to achieve further positive results, especially in building the capacity of government officials to operate a national asylum system, in securing access of asylum-seeker children to formal education in state schools, in raising public awareness about refugee issues, and in contributing to improving the living conditions of urban IDPs. In the absence of a functioning national asylum system, UNHCR remained the only reliable source of protection and assistance for thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees. Through a whole range of activities and outreach, the Office worked with its partners to assure a smooth transition from emergency assistance for IDPs to broader developmental strategies

In **Belarus**, in 2003 a revised national Refugee Law came into force, with 14 by-laws which to a large extent meet international standards. However, some concerns remain regarding the full compliance of the revised Law with international standards. UNHCR continued to advocate the local integration of refugees as a durable solution. Although full integration remains difficult, 79 per cent of recognized refugees have access to the state welfare, education and health systems. The establishment of a reception facility at the international airport should facilitate delivery of assistance to asylum-seekers. UNHCR was invited to share its expertise in a seminar on illegal migration under the aegis of the Belarusian-Russian Union State Parliamentary Assembly. UNHCR continued working closely with UN agencies. Cooperation was further developed with UNDP, IOM and the European Union on the issue of combating human trafficking including participation in the Advisory Board of a UNDP project. No progress was made, however, towards the conclusion of the Host Country Agreement.

In **Georgia**, apart from the Pankisi and the South Ossetian operations mentioned above, UNHCR continued its school rehabilitation project in Abkhazia, albeit on a reduced scale, for 1,500 children. There was no significant breakthrough in the peace process in 2003. Most of the security incidents were apolitical crimes. UNHCR's distribution of materials was occasionally hampered by these incidents, as roads and the bridge crossing into Abkhazia were periodically closed. UNHCR assistance in Abkhazia helped to restore a sense of normality to the lives of IDP and local children affected by the conflict.

UNHCR continued to provide assistance on a reduced scale to IDPs in Georgia proper. A national NGO continued to implement a non-formal education programme for adolescent IDPs in western Georgia. Vocational schools benefited vulnerable IDPs and local adolescents. In addition, UNHCR was provided with extra-budgetary funds to rehabilitate earthquake damaged IDP collective centres in Tbilisi, benefiting 3,301 IDP residents at 20 collective centres.

In **Moldova**, 1 January 2003 marked the entry into force of the national law on the Status of Refugees, and the start of management by the Main Directorate for Refugees (MDR). Strengthening of the MDR, which has to coordinate all government activities in the field of asylum, remained a priority. Several training events and familiarization/study visits were implemented in order to enhance the professional skills of MDR staff responsible for refugee status determination and migration management. The first phase of the construction of a reception centre for asylum-seekers was finalized, within the framework of cooperation with the European Commission's TACIS programme. At the end of the year, Moldova hosted a total of 102 refugees and 140 asylum-seekers. Eight persons were resettled to a third country and 36 persons (originating from Chechnya) opted for voluntary repatriation. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach to migration and overall economic development, UNHCR continued its cooperation with UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank, and OSCE and organized joint seminars on asylum and migration issues with the Council of Europe and the Swedish Migration Board. Due to its geographical location and inadequate border controls, Moldova continued to attract a large number of illegal migrants in transit to the EU area. In addition, a large number of citizens of Moldova (as many as 20 per cent, according to some estimates) have migrated, mostly illegally, to EU countries and Russia.

UNHCR continued to assist authorities in **Ukraine** to develop a national asylum system in accordance with international standards and norms. UNHCR faced various problems in its efforts to secure access for asylum-seekers to fair and effective procedures. These problems involved not only serious shortcomings in the national Refugee Law, but also its interpretation and implementation by asylum authorities. In addition to the 1,367 persons who applied for asylum in 2003 (plus a backlog of approximately 250 asylum-seekers), 2,877 persons recognized as refugees by asylum authorities were registered as residing in Ukraine by the end of the year.

The Office continued to provide advice and technical expertise to border and migration authorities at central, provincial and local levels. A network of existing NGOs continued to be instrumental in monitoring the borders (especially with regard to *non-refoulement*). However, UNHCR could make little progress in its support for internationally acceptable migration management while the authorities directed nearly all their resources to "combating illegal migration".

UNHCR expanded its capacity-building activities to include the police and the judiciary. Working in cooperation with the Council of Europe, UNHCR organized a seminar for judges and prosecutors on asylum and refugee protection. This had a positive effect, as did a UNHCR position paper on the high number of admission rejections. By July 2003, some appeals were being decided in favour of asylum-seekers, allowing them access to subsequent procedures.

UNHCR continued to facilitate and support the local integration of refugees. Although refugees are

granted basic social, economic and cultural rights, there are still many obstacles to their self-reliance and local integration. In 2003, 155 refugees acquired Ukrainian citizenship, which is a laudable development inasmuch as the naturalization process began only in 2002 (yielding 24 new citizens in its first year).

The impact of public information activities was demonstrated by thoughtful media interest in asylum and migration issues. Donor organizations took an increased interest in the specific situation of asylum-seekers and migrants in the Zakarpatye region. Seven NGO partners received alternative funding, which allowed UNHCR to re-direct funds to meet other priorities.

Funding

The projected funding shortfall had a drastic effect in Eastern Europe, where only 90 per cent of the original ExCom-approved budget could be financed. Fortunately, this was foreseen early in the year, and so planning could be undertaken with partners so as to avoid the sort of financial crunch experienced in the final quarters of 2001 and 2002. On the positive side, it should be noted that earmarked contributions were received to cover the full budget of the IDP operation in the Northern Caucasus. Furthermore, effective measures were taken in 2003 to raise donor support for specific activities such as asylum system development in Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine, returns to South Ossetia, as well as resettlement of certain population groups of concern to the High Commissioner, particularly in the Russian Federation.

Voluntary contributions - Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Earmarking	Annual programme budget	
		Income	Contribution
Armenia	Japan Association for UNHCR (JPN)	8,333	8,333
	Switzerland	370,370	370,370
Azerbaijan	STATOIL (NOR)	50,000	50,000
	United States of America	75,000	75,000
Belarus	Lithuania	2,973	2,973

Earmarking ¹	Earmarking	Annual programme budget	
		Income	Contribution
Eastern Europe			
	Japan	600,000	600,000
	Sweden	1,026,226	1,026,226
	United States of America	3,828,000	3,828,000
Georgia			
	Canada	136,054	136,054
	Norway	551,724	551,724
Moldova			
	European Commission	359,618	577,215
Russian Federation			
	Association Française de Soutien à l'UNHCR (FRA)	200,000	200,000
	Canada	176,871	176,871
	European Commission	920,206	718,358
	Florindon Foundation, Switzerland	190,000	190,000
	Germany	523,952	523,952
	Japan	300,000	300,000
	Netherlands	475,000	475,000
	Switzerland	745,792	745,792
	United Kingdom	53,763	53,763
	United States of America	3,560,880	3,560,880
Ukraine			
	European Commission	951,899	1,488,335
Total		15,106,661	15,658,846

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

Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Armenia	1,559,920	1,550,394
Azerbaijan	2,972,711	2,953,819
Belarus	874,405	851,272
Georgia	4,738,736	4,712,556
Republic of Moldova	1,143,795	1,098,296
Russian Federation	12,325,642	12,189,739
Ukraine	2,548,077	2,108,387
Regional projects ¹	407,759	306,266
Total	26,571,045	25,770,729

¹ Includes scholarships for refugee students and the follow-up to the CIS Conference