

# Eastern Europe

## Major Developments

In Eastern Europe, where asylum systems are still new and little developed, States still need considerable support if they are to fully assume their responsibilities for refugee management and cope with the phenomenon of transit migration. It was heartening to note the accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol by Belarus in May 2001, the Republic of Moldova in November 2001 and Ukraine's stated intention to accede in 2002. In most countries in the region, national refugee legislation is in place. With the exception of Moldova and Azerbaijan, refugee status determination mechanisms are in place, but the quality and consistency of their work still tend to fall short of international standards.

Eastern Europe has been marked by very diverse trends in its distinct sub-regions, including transit migration, war, "frozen" conflicts, economic hardship and social decline. This has had an impact on migration flows, security and the prospects for solutions for asylum-seekers and refugees.

Armenia  
Azerbaijan  
Belarus  
Georgia  
Republic of Moldova  
Russian Federation  
Ukraine

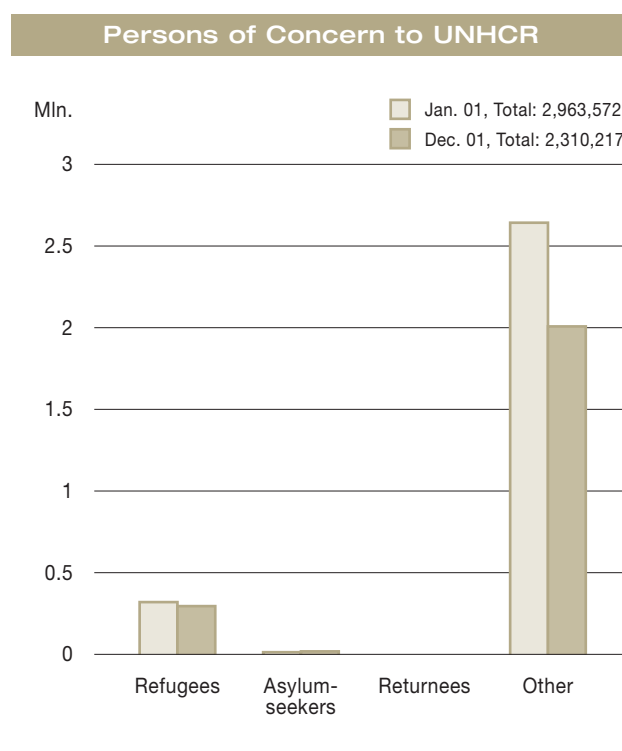


Large areas of Eastern Europe, in particular the Russian Federation and its western neighbours Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, are experiencing transit migration movements which can, in part, be understood as fall-out from the dissolution of the former USSR. For these countries' contacts with countries of origin and destination have become increasingly important. UNHCR responded by promoting and facilitating cross-border dialogue on migration and asylum issues, using, or improving, existing regional consultation mechanisms such as the follow-up process of the 1996 CIS Conference.

The unresolved major conflicts in the Caucasus hamper socio-economic stability and development and lead to new tension. Protracted insecurity and violence in Chechnya (Russian Federation) left Chechen refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) unable to return, and an increasing number of them remained outside the Russian Federation, unable to find food, shelter and protection without external assistance. The presence of Chechen refugees has, thus, become more visible, adding to the political complexity of the region.

The negative overall economic impact of protracted displacement is increasingly felt in countries with limited resources. UNHCR has continued to work

with development partners and the governments in the region to promote the application of poverty reduction mechanisms to refugees and displaced persons set in motion by the World Bank and UN agencies.



## Challenges and Concerns

In the North and South Caucasus, complex conflicts have reached stalemate and pose a range of challenges for the delivery of protection and assistance. In several places, poor security hindered access and monitoring, constituting fundamental obstacles to lasting solutions. IDPs and refugees from Chechnya could not return to their places of origin. In the absence of any progress in the negotiations between the Georgian Government and Abkhaz separatists, and with continuous low-intensity fighting in the region, the return of ethnic Georgian IDPs to Abkhazia could not take place. Similarly, pending a breakthrough in the negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of IDPs and refugees remained on hold. The protracted character of these displacements calls for interim solutions that will give the displaced people clearly recognised legal status and entitlement to participation in the social and economic life of the host societies. To this effect, UNHCR continued to encourage the self-sufficiency of refugees and other displaced groups and their inclusion in development programmes.

The combination of deteriorating economies and increasing xenophobia in some Eastern European countries had a negative impact on the situation of asylum-seekers and hampered the integration of recognised non-European refugees. This compelled UNHCR to seek resettlement as a solution for some refugees.

## Progress Toward Solutions

UNHCR assisted governments in Eastern Europe in bridging the gap between asylum and refugee legislation and its proper implementation. UNHCR helped local NGOs to build their capacity to respond to the needs of asylum-seekers, refugees and the displaced. Integration of refugees in their countries of asylum in the region remained a major challenge.

Finding durable solutions to the plight of those displaced due to conflict in Chechnya remained a key objective for UNHCR in the Caucasus. In Ingushetia, UNHCR assisted over 160,000 IDPs with accommodation, water, sanitation and basic domestic requirements, and continued to extend to this group a

measure of protection from involuntary return. These efforts were an important part of the inter-agency operation and were complementary to efforts by the Russian Federation. In Georgia, UNHCR provided limited assistance for an estimated 7,000 Chechen refugees, though security conditions periodically prevented access. In Azerbaijan, UNHCR had to increase its allocation to address the needs of an increasingly destitute group of Chechen refugees and asylum-seekers. As for Chechnya, a number of convoys of food and non-food relief items were sent in and distributed through NGO implementing partners. This limited relief complemented the efforts of the local and federal authorities, other UN agencies and NGOs.

Through the Programme of Action adopted at the CIS Conference in Geneva in 1996, national capacities for migration management and protection mechanisms have been built throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and the role of NGOs and civil society has been enhanced. Although the formal CIS Conference process ended in July 2000, the parties – States, NGOs, the UN and others – remain committed to its overall objectives. The final meeting of the Steering Group, therefore, decided to extend relevant activities for another five years within a theme-oriented work plan and under a changed title. UNHCR contributed to the finalisation of the work plan and its implementation. Expert consultations and activities at the country level addressed the main themes: failings in the development of adequately functioning national asylum and migration management systems in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; implementation of national refugee and citizenship legislation; the reduction and avoidance of statelessness; and support to NGO and civil society development. UNHCR, IOM, OSCE and the Council of Europe continue to act as lead agencies, overseeing and facilitating governmental action. Field co-operation between these agencies has been boosted through an inter-agency meeting of all Eastern European and Central Asian heads of mission and through subsequent sub-regional follow-up.

The European Union is preparing to expand eastwards at the same time as increasing numbers of migrants are attempting to cross the borders of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus on their way westward. UNHCR is responding by strengthening its



partnership with the EU, IOM and UN agencies in order to build the capacity of the governments in the region to deal with the challenges related to migration and transit movements. For example, UNHCR and the Swedish Migration Board co-organised a series of cross-border workshops on asylum and border management for representatives of Baltic, Central and East European countries, using a modified version of the thematic approach taken by the 1996 CIS Conference follow-up process.

## Operations

UNHCR operations in the **Russian Federation** and in **Georgia** are described in separate chapters.

UNHCR's key objectives in **Armenia** are to create high-quality asylum through proper implementation of national legislation in line with the 1951 Convention, to which Armenia is a party, and to reduce statelessness. The Law on Refugees adopted in 1999 largely met international standards, but amendments passed in 2001 have, unfortunately, narrowed the asylum space in Armenia. Since the start of the naturalisation campaign in 1999, over 40,000 refugees have acquired Armenian citizenship. Armenia continues to accord all possible civil, political and socio-economic rights to all ethnic Armenian refugees, thus practically eliminating their protection concerns. In close co-operation with other international partners such as OSCE, IOM, the Council of Europe, and the UN, UNHCR continues to successfully advocate the inclusion of refugees as a vulnerable group in countrywide development initiatives, including the evolving UN Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

**Azerbaijan** hosts some 7,800 refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq. Additionally, 570,000 persons are internally displaced, of whom some 50,000 vulnerable individuals are assisted by UNHCR. Despite provisions in the national asylum legislation, procedures for the

determination of refugee status have not yet been put in place. UNHCR therefore continued under its mandate to determine the eligibility of a growing number of asylum-seekers and to search for long-term solutions for refugees. UNHCR helped in establishing a temporary protection regime from which many Afghan and Chechen refugees have



Russian Federation: IDPs from Chechnya outside their temporary home in Ingushetia.  
UNHCR / M. Shinohara

benefited: UNHCR issued "letters of concern" to asylum-seekers to ensure their *non-refoulement*. In the light of the prevailing difficulties encountered in the process of trying to integrate recognised refugees, UNHCR embarked on a resettlement programme, and in 2001. A total of 234 persons were resettled in third countries. UNHCR called for the inclusion in longer-term development plans for internally displaced persons and refugees-displaced as a result of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

In an attempt to contribute to the Government's effort to reduce and avoid statelessness and to design appropriate tools for further campaigning, UNHCR commissioned a survey amongst the Meskhetians. The survey showed that 86 per cent of the Meskhetians had obtained citizenship. UNHCR will continue to collaborate with the Council of Europe and the authorities in order to ensure that Meskhetians are informed of their rights.

In 2001, **Belarus** acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (without appending

any reservations to its implementation). This important step provides a legal basis for amending the existing national legislation. Refugee status determination procedures remained operational throughout the country, with a recognition rate of 65 per cent. By the end of the year, there were 600 recognised refugees in Belarus. Some 1,000 asylum-seekers and refugees benefited from legal and social assistance sponsored by UNHCR. Some progress was made in local integration of recognised refugees, as 24 persons obtained a *propiska* (residence registration) and legal accommodation. Public information activities resulted in the wider coverage of refugee issues, and UNHCR's work in the country became more widely known.

The accession by the **Republic of Moldova**, in 2001, to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol was a major landmark, as were the adoption of the national refugee law and the creation of a government body to deal with refugees and asylum-seekers. Moldova's geographical location, combined with its difficult economic situation, continued to attract unchecked and illegal migration of people transiting the country. UNHCR helped the authorities to acquire knowledge of best practices in relation to refugees, asylum-seekers and migration in general (e.g. by means of visits by officials to neighbouring countries). The country hosted 162 refugees and 113 asylum-seekers. Nine of the most vulnerable refugees were resettled during the year. In recognition of the need for a broad-based approach to migration and overall economic issues, UNHCR expanded its co-operation with UNICEF, OSCE, the World Bank and UNDP, and explored new avenues opened up by the EU Stability Pact, which Moldova joined in 2001. Moldova was also an active participant in various discussions and workshops aimed at improving border management with its neighbours.

**Ukraine** has adopted national refugee legislation and relevant administrative practices. In 2001, it concluded all the formalities preliminary to accession to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Qualitative improvements were introduced to the process of determining refugee status. The NGO network was strengthened, notably by the creation of legal clinics, which improved the quality of services as well as their reach throughout the country. UNHCR tried to promote the local integration of

recognised refugees, notwithstanding the difficult economic conditions in the country. However, at the end of 2001, of the 5,174 refugees recognised since 1996, some 2,983 were reported to be still living in temporary accommodation, with little chance of becoming economically independent or socially integrated.

Some 25,000 formerly deported people (FDPs) obtained Ukrainian citizenship during 2001 under the new citizenship law (adopted in 2001) and the simplified procedures for renouncing previous citizenship, reducing the number of de facto or potentially stateless FDPs in the country to 348. This was achieved with continuing support from UNHCR through information campaigns and counselling.

Owing to frequent reform, dissolution and reconstitution of the main government body in charge of asylum and refugees, the country suffered a setback in its endeavours to develop effective and efficient asylum processes. Ukraine benefited from various training programmes and workshops sponsored by UNHCR to promote a humane system of managing irregular migration, and enhance dialogue with neighbouring countries.

## Funding

UNHCR's overall funding shortfall in 2001 particularly affected the operations in Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Georgia. Projects for non-core groups, such as Involuntary Relocating Persons, Formerly Deported Peoples and IDPs, were particularly targeted. A number of posts were also cut during 2001. The consequences of these reductions on UNHCR's ability to effectively address core activities, as well as on its overall management capacity in the region, are being carefully monitored.

Voluntary Contributions – Restricted (USD)			
Donor	Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Annual Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution
Action Réfugiés (FRA)	Armenia	74	74
	Russian Federation	2,938	2,938
Canada	Russian Federation	261,438	261,438
Deutsche Stiftung (GFR)	Russian Federation	115,263	115,263
ENI (Agip Azerbaijan) Italy	Azerbaijan	440,000	
European Commission	Russian Federation	1,785,766	1,785,841
Finland	Russian Federation	301,142	301,142
France	Eastern Europe	66,746	66,746
Germany	Georgia	139,443	139,443
	Russian Federation	495,536	495,536
Human Appeal Int. (UAE)	Russian Federation	30,017	30,017
Islamic Association of Bahrain (BAH)	Russian Federation	36,000	36,000
Japan	Armenia	250,000	250,000
	Azerbaijan	250,000	250,000
	Belarus	250,000	250,000
	Georgia	200,000	200,000
	Moldova	250,000	250,000
	Russian Federation	250,000	250,000
	Ukraine	250,000	250,000
Netherlands	Russian Federation	625,615	625,615
Private Donors Italy	Moldova	2,604	2,604
Sweden	Eastern Europe	937,500	937,500
Switzerland	Armenia	224,719	224,719
	Russian Federation	561,798	561,798
United Kingdom	Russian Federation	330,000	330,000
United States of America	Azerbaijan	200,000	200,000
	Eastern Europe	8,800,000	8,800,000
	Georgia	400,000	400,000
	Russian Federation	1,400,000	1,400,000
<b>TOTAL<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>18,856,599</b>	<b>18,416,674</b>

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

<sup>2</sup> Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unrestricted voluntary contributions, lightly restricted contributions, opening balances and adjustments.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised Budget	Expenditure
	Annual Programme Budget	
Armenia	2,940,698	2,908,188
Azerbaijan	4,070,597	3,997,331
Belarus	829,361	780,030
Republic of Moldova	1,115,378	1,081,073
Russian Federation	17,135,819	15,202,972
Regional Projects <sup>1</sup>	687,452	486,718
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36,282,567</b>	<b>33,320,202</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes scholarships for refugee students, and follow-up on the CIS Conference.