

Eastern Europe

Recent Developments

In Eastern Europe, the asylum space is slowly expanding through the adoption of legislation and the development of asylum systems. During the last couple of years Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have made significant progress in this respect. Belarus acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 2001 without major reservation. In Moldova, the Government has put in place a new authority to deal with refugee affairs, including refugee status determination. In Ukraine, the new national refugee legislation complies with international requirements. Moldova and Ukraine have signalled that they may accede to the 1951 Convention before the end of 2001. These positive developments are the fruit of a long-standing relationship between the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and UNHCR. Since the early 1990s, UNHCR has helped States in the region to build refugee and migration management systems through amended national asylum and citizenship legislation underpinned by accession to the relevant international instruments.

In several parts of Eastern Europe, UNHCR's working environment is extremely volatile and insecure, severely compromising the efficient provision of protection and assistance. The security situation also constitutes a constant and direct threat to the safety of refugees and displaced persons, as well as to humanitarian workers. Complex population displacements resulting from conflicts in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan

and the Northern Caucasus region of the Russian Federation continue to give cause for concern. Many of the conflicts have reached a stalemate, leaving only the bleakest of prospects for safe return of the internally displaced and the refugees. Earlier hopes of significant economic and social change - leading to self-reliance, local integration or temporary solutions for the displaced - have proven misplaced. There are still more than 155,000 Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia (Russian Federation), some 7,000 Chechen refugees in Georgia, and smaller numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees from Chechnya in the other countries in Eastern Europe. Durable solutions have yet to be found for the majority of the 270,000 people in Georgia displaced by the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. UNHCR has sought durable solutions through naturalisation for over half a million refugees who fled into Armenia and Azerbaijan at the time of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Some 570,000 persons remain internally displaced in Azerbaijan.

Against this background, UNHCR continues to pursue durable solutions and contribute to conflict resolution processes in collaboration with the governments concerned, other UN

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Georgia
Republic of Moldova
Russian Federation
Ukraine



agencies, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Council of Europe, NGOs and civil society. UNHCR is promoting partnership and co-ordination both within and outside the region to generate practical approaches to the challenges. The Office will build on regional initiatives such as the consultations held in 2001 on citizenship and statelessness and on asylum and border management between West, Central and East European neighbours.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR’s activities in Eastern Europe are multi-faceted, involving protection and assistance for asylum-seekers, refugees and other displaced persons of concern. Governments in Eastern Europe are in the process of adopting and amending national asylum legislation, and UNHCR is providing expertise to ensure that asylum policies and practices meet international standards. UNHCR is enhancing national capacities, through legal and technical assistance, in particular for refugee status determination. A central objective is to ensure that asylum-seekers have access to appropriate asylum procedures within an environment that increasingly focuses on migration management. UNHCR works in pursuit of these goals with governments, parliamentarians, NGOs, civil society, the media and educational institutions, and other international organisations.

UNHCR will continue to support the return and integration of refugees and other persons of concern through social and legal counselling, income-generation, self-reliance programmes and the rehabilitation of permanent accommodation. A key UNHCR priority is to gain the support of public opinion for the cause of asylum-seekers and refugees and thereby create conditions conducive to their integration. Other durable solutions will also be explored as necessary, such as resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees (to a third country). On the preventive side, UNHCR calls for durable solutions for displaced people to be approached as integral elements of conflict resolution and peace-building processes. Furthermore, UNHCR is a catalyst in strengthening emergency preparedness and increasing the speed and efficiency of the international response to population displacement.

A considerable portion of UNHCR’s activities aim to reduce statelessness. To this end, the Office will continue to urge accession to the relevant international instruments, provide expertise on citizenship legislation and its implementation, help governments and NGOs enhance appropriate institutional capacity and conduct public information campaigns.

UNHCR is scaling down its activities for displaced or relocated groups not directly under its mandate. This particularly affects programmes in the Russian Federation, Georgia and Ukraine, where the hand-over to other actors is being acceler-

ated. Assistance to the most vulnerable persons of concern in Azerbaijan and Armenia will also be consolidated. To bridge gaps between humanitarian and more developmental interventions, UNHCR will continue to promote regional approaches and partnership.

Operations

In addition to the country programmes in the **Russian Federation** and **Georgia**, which are presented in separate chapters, UNHCR has operations in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

In **Armenia**, considerable progress has been made in the integration of some 280,000 refugees into local society, and more than 37,000 persons have acquired citizenship so far. Nevertheless, further efforts are required to ensure that the majority of the refugees enjoy access to interventions that further durable solutions. UNHCR will extend a modest assistance programme addressing the social and psychological needs of the elderly (more than 40 per cent of the refugee population is over the age of 50) and those in sub-standard housing. UNHCR will help national entities to implement national and international refugee-related legislation and to assume increased responsibility for dealing with the existing refugee population and new asylum-seekers. In so doing, UNHCR pushes for the creation of fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures.

In **Azerbaijan**, the Government has recently adopted three presidential decrees, earmarking some USD 36 million from the country's Oil Fund, for assistance to IDPs and refugees. UNHCR is providing guidance to the Government to ensure that the resulting interventions will target the most vulnerable groups – among them some 570,000 IDPs who are not yet able to return to their homes and land. In view of the phase-out of several international humanitarian agencies from the IDP operation, UNHCR is pursuing the mainstreaming of humanitarian interventions into the national poverty alleviation and economic recovery programmes. The success of this approach will depend on the collaboration of development agencies. UNHCR will therefore work even more closely with the Government, the World Bank, UNDP, UNFPA and other partners to promote self-reliance and local settlement, without prejudice to an eventual return of IDPs to their places of origin. Modest assistance, including improved shelter, income-generation, health, education and community services will be provided to the most needy IDPs and refugees. In parallel, UNHCR will maintain its contingency plans in case of a breakthrough in the efforts led by the OSCE Minsk Group to achieve a political solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

UNHCR supports the Government in building a fair and efficient asylum system, ensuring that protection safeguards are built into relevant national mechanisms, including border management. The naturalisation and integration of ethnic Azeri and non-CIS refugees remain key objectives. In partnership with



Azerbaijan: IDPs in Barda area receiving reproductive health care in a recently opened clinic. *UNHCR/A. Hollmann.*

the Council of Europe, UNHCR will continue efforts to assist the Parliament, other relevant bodies and national NGOs in drafting and adopting new NGO-legislation.

Belarus acceded to the 1951 refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in 2001. In a challenging context of mixed migration flows, UNHCR will assist the Government in fulfilling its international refugee obligations, such as ensuring asylum-seekers have access to refugee status determination procedures. UNHCR will support the integration of recognized refugees through projects such as rehabilitation of shelter. UNHCR will also aim at building the capacity of NGOs to deal with asylum-seekers and refugees.

The main objective of UNHCR's operation in the **Republic of Moldova** is to assist the Government in its fulfilment of the relevant international refugee obligations, including drafting national refugee legislation and establishing adequate institutional capacities. UNHCR will seek to enhance the capacity of NGOs to play a more active role. Pending the adoption of the national refugee law, UNHCR will continue the joint registration of asylum-seekers with the Ministry of Interior. The plan is to hand over refugee status determination procedures to the Directorate for Refugees recently established under the Ministry of Justice. Support to vulnerable asylum-seekers will continue, and UNHCR will work with the World Bank and OSCE on the reconstruction or refurbishment of educational and medical facilities, to give IDPs some medium-term stability.

In **Ukraine**, UNHCR's ultimate objective is to build a modern and efficient asylum/refugee system. The next steps will be accession to the 1951 Convention and implementation of a revised national refugee law, bringing procedures into line with the highest standards of international practice. Capacity-building will focus mainly on the restructured State Department of Nationalities and Migration, regional migration services and other relevant authorities on the western border. The establishment of legal clinics and training of judges will strengthen co-operation among relevant government authorities, the legislature, NGOs involved in the legal counselling network, and academia. In parallel, UNHCR will continue to provide basic supplies, legal, medical and educational assistance to asylum-seekers awaiting the outcome of their applications. For recognised refugees, the emphasis will be on activities designed to accelerate their social and economic integration, including an income-generation programme, job creation, vocational skills training and a short-term business training programme.

Follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference on the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Migration and Asylum Issues

The CIS Conference in 1996 and its follow-up process have provided a comprehensive strategy for addressing and preventing population displacement. The Programme of Action adopted by the CIS Conference has helped States make sub-

stantial progress in building refugee and migration management systems. It has also improved the capacity of civil society and co-operation between governments and NGOs. At the end of the official follow-up to the 1996 Conference in July 2000, the Steering Group adopted a set of recommendations for future activities. In pursuit of lasting solutions, the lead agencies UNHCR, OSCE, IOM and the Council of Europe have developed a joint Work Plan with the following broad themes: groups of concern; migration and border management, including combating illegal migration and trafficking in human beings; sustaining the achievements of the NGO sector and civil society; and implementing legislation.

Activities under each agreed theme are facilitated by the lead agencies according to their respective mandates and expertise. UNHCR will concentrate mainly on protection matters, in particular activities related to building national asylum and migration management systems in accordance with international standards, including the implementation of national refugee and citizenship legislation. UNHCR will also focus on the reduction and preclusion of statelessness, and NGO and civil society development. UNHCR's regional NGO strategy (revised in 2001) is centred around greater financial and operational sustainability for NGOs. Related objectives are increased cross-border cooperation among NGOs and bringing NGOs from the CIS countries into the PARinAC framework.

In the coming year, UNHCR, in its capacity as lead agency, will organise expert meetings and seminars to analyse existing problems and obstacles and to develop appropriate ways of addressing them. The findings will then be the focus of a high-level review meeting attended by all participating parties to assess progress made and agree on guiding principles and approaches in the continued search for solutions.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Armenia	2,557,652
Azerbaijan	2,732,934
Belarus	779,616
Georgia	5,365,825
Republic of Moldova	1,045,708
Russian Federation	15,545,509
Ukraine	2,136,053
Regional Activities ¹	665,000
Total	30,828,297

¹ Includes follow-up to the Geneva conference on the problem of refugees, deported people, migration and asylum issues.