

Eastern Europe

Recent Developments

UNHCR has been working with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) since the early 1990s. Initially, the Office responded to emergency displacements in the Caucasus and Tajikistan. Over the past decade, UNHCR's programmes have evolved into longer-term, more comprehensive projects to help the States in the region develop effective asylum systems. UNHCR has helped governments draft and amend asylum and citizenship laws, in conformity with international standards, and continues to advise on implementation. These capacity-building activities were accompanied by efforts towards accession to the relevant international instruments, particularly the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, in order to shore up States' international obligations.

UNHCR's objectives and programmes were further shaped and boosted when the CIS Conference adopted its Programme of Action in 1996. This Programme, and its follow-up process, provided a comprehensive strategy for addressing current problems of displacement, and to prevent future displacement. As a result, appropriate refugee and migration management systems would be based on increased respect for the specific rights – and human rights, in a broader sense – of all categories of displaced people identified by

the Programme of Action. These include internally displaced persons (IDPs), formerly deported peoples (FDPs), involuntary relo-



Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Georgia
Republic of Moldova
Russian Federation
Ukraine



cating persons (IRPs) and returnees. The Programme also encompasses activities conducive to the empowerment of civil society, capacity building for key NGOs and closer collaboration between the governments and NGOs. (Please refer to 'Follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference on the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Migration and Asylum Issues' at the end of this chapter.)

Following fighting in Chechnya (Russian Federation) in 1999, the first half of 2000 saw continued outflows of people forced to flee their homes owing to ongoing conflict. Most went to Ingushetia, where UNHCR assisted the authorities (along with other UN agencies and NGOs) to provide shelter and other basic assistance in camps, for host families and in spontaneous settlements. During the summer months, several thousand returned to Chechnya, but lack of basic living conditions and security led some to return to Ingushetia. As the winter approaches, some 170,000 remain displaced outside Chechnya, mostly in Ingushetia but also in Georgia, and are in need of food, shelter, health care, education and counselling. Seventy per cent of the displaced live with host families. Their hospitality is wearing thin, despite support to them. Additional shelter is needed to ensure that the displaced, if turned out by host families, do not feel forced to return to Chechnya. Inside Chechnya, an estimated 170,000 more people are either displaced or have returned to heavily destroyed areas. Their needs are great. UNHCR has sent relief convoys whenever security conditions permit basic assessment and distribution. Other UN agencies are also participating in the relief effort. The needs in the Northern Caucasus are also described in the 2001 UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal.

Strategic Objectives

In Eastern Europe, development of asylum systems competes with other pressing priorities for States, such as addressing migratory flows and serious economic and social challenges. UNHCR's ultimate goal in the region is to establish an integrated network of consistently fair and efficient asylum systems. In 2001, the Office will concentrate on: the passage of asylum laws and adoption of policies that meet international standards; nurturing public opinion sympathetic towards refugees' needs and supportive of integration efforts; the reduction and prevention of statelessness in the region; building effective emergency preparedness and response capacity; addressing the protection and assistance needs of displaced people, including IRPs; and the pursuit of long-term solutions.

In pursuit of these goals, UNHCR will focus on enhancing national institutional capacities, by means of: the elaboration of national policies on asylum and migration; the establishment and implementation of legislation; the development of refugee status determination procedures compliant with international standards; ensuring access to such procedures by asylum-seekers; training; technical advice; and counselling. This work will run in parallel with intensive lobbying and public relations activities, which will enhance co-operation with parliamentarians, the media and educational institutions.

UNHCR will provide assistance to facilitate the return and integration of refugees and other persons of concern, including IRPs, and support the search for solutions for FDPs, through social and legal counselling, income-generation, self-reliance programmes and the rehabilitation of permanent accommoda-



tion. Other avenues will, if necessary, also be explored, such as resettlement of the most vulnerable persons.

Reducing statelessness is also part of UNHCR activities in the region. To achieve this, the Office will: urge accession to the relevant international instruments; provide expertise on citizenship legislation and its implementation; help governments and NGOs build up the institutional expertise and resources they require; and conduct public information campaigns.

UNHCR is involved in several areas where conflict has led to displacement: Georgia, Armenia/Azerbaijan and the northern Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. These conflicts mostly have been deadlocked for some years, and the problems of the displaced remain unresolved. Although these are essentially situations of internal displacement, the displaced populations in all cases include refugees. UNHCR's programmes will be geared towards achieving effective emergency response, and then facilitating either return or local integration. This will be pursued in collaboration with the governments concerned, other UN agencies, OSCE, NGOs and other partners. If possible, the Office will participate in conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Operations

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

UNHCR's main objective in **Armenia** is to promote the integration of ethnic Armenian refugees into the national society, particularly by encouraging and supporting the naturalisation process. UNHCR will also be involved in building up the expertise and resources of government institutions and local NGOs, in ensuring the implementation of national refugee-related legislation and international norms, and preparing to hand over to national institutions the responsibility for dealing

with the current refugee population and new asylum-seekers. The Office also supports the Government's shelter programme. UNHCR will encourage the creation of fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures for new asylum-seekers and further training of relevant government institutions.

In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR aims to strengthen national asylum and assistance procedures, while continuing to provide assistance to IDPs and refugees. At the same time, the Office is supporting a smooth transition from humanitarian assistance to longer-term develop-

ment. UNHCR will continue to work in close partnership with the Government, the World Bank, UNDP, UNFPA and other partners to promote self-reliance and local settlement (without prejudice to the eventual return of IDPs). Modest multi-sectoral assistance, including shelter improvement, income-generation, health, education and community services will be provided for the most needy IDPs and refugees. The relevant national structures will be helped to provide protection and assistance to asylum-seekers and new refugees. Continued efforts will be made to put the recently adopted citizenship and refugee legislation into practice for the naturalisation and integration of Meskhetian, Afghan and ethnic Azeri refugees. UNHCR will advise on legislation and legal procedures provide relevant training and raise public awareness of refugee issues. In partnership with the Council of Europe, UNHCR will continue to help the Parliament, other relevant bodies and national NGOs to draft and adopt new NGO legislation.

In **Belarus**, UNHCR's primary objective remains to assist the authorities to establish a system for managing population movements which adheres to international norms and in which human rights are respected. At this stage, UNHCR's role remains crucial in enhancing the quality of asylum in the context of mixed migration flows. UNHCR will continue to help the Government develop national institutions, especially in the regions, in order to bring new national refugee status determination procedures into line with international standards, ensure access to these new procedures and promote the integration of recognised refugees, including by supporting projects involving rehabilitation of shelter. The Office will maintain its advocacy role in urging Belarus to accede to the 1951 Convention. UNHCR will also be involved in training NGOs address the needs of refugees and respond to migration issues.

The main objective of UNHCR's operation in the **Republic of Moldova** is to help the Government to accede to the 1951 Convention, draft refugee legislation, and establish adequate

institutional capacities. UNHCR will continue to help the Government build up the technical and human resources necessary to deal effectively with issues relating to refugees and IDPs. UNHCR will also help NGOs to play a meaningful role in this field. Prior to the adoption of the national refugee law and the creation of a central authority, UNHCR will commence joint registration of asylum-seekers with the Ministry of Interior, with a view to handing over refugee status determination procedures to the authorities. UNHCR will continue to help the Government to support vulnerable asylum-seekers and seek to regularise their status to prevent *refoulement* and statelessness, until effective asylum is safeguarded. In cooperation with the World Bank and OSCE, some educational and medical facilities will be rebuilt or refurbished for use by IDPs.

In **Ukraine**, UNHCR's work centres on building national asylum and refugee management systems, and the integration of FDPs in Crimea. UNHCR will continue to lobby decision-makers to hasten Ukraine's accession to the 1951 Convention and the adoption and subsequent implementation of a revised national refugee law in line with international standards. Capacity building will focus mainly on the restructured State Department of Nationalities and Migration, regional migration services and relevant authorities on the western border. This will be achieved through training, seminars and study visits. The establishment of legal clinics will strengthen closer cooperation between relevant government authorities, NGOs involved in the legal counselling network and academia. The training of judges will help to strengthen the judiciary. At the same time, UNHCR will continue to provide basic material, legal, medical and educational assistance to asylum-seekers whose applications are still pending. For recognised refugees, the emphasis will be on various integration activities, including an income-generation programme, job creation, vocational skills training and short business training courses. In Crimea, UNHCR will continue to try to speed up the naturalisation of the remaining FDPs. Assistance will be given to the most vulnerable FDPs to facilitate their integration. Meanwhile, UNHCR will establish joint arrangements with development agencies and other international organisations such as UNDP and the World Bank to include FDPs in wider development programmes.

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

As outlined in the Programme of Action adopted in 1996, follow-up to the CIS Conference was concluded in 2000. To maintain the impetus of the process, however, the Steering Group adopted a set of recommendations for the future, focusing on four broad thematic issues: groups of concern identified by the Programme of Action; migration and border manage-

ment, including combating illegal migration and trafficking of people; sustaining the achievements and activities of the NGO sector and civil society; and implementing legislation without leaving gaps. Activities structured around these thematic issues (and others, where appropriate) will be directed by expert working groups set up by the lead agencies. UNHCR will organise a series of expert meetings to analyse existing problems and obstacles relating to the four themes and develop ways of addressing them. These consultations may lead to a high-level meeting of the participating parties in 2001, to assess progress made.

The Conference process can claim success in developing the NGO sector, and indeed in helping to foster the support of civil society. UNHCR will continue to help local NGOs to build up the institutional expertise and resources they require to work effectively with refugees and the displaced, by engineering further collaboration between them and governments. At the international level, UNHCR will continue to support the CIS-wide NGO working groups which are engaged in building the operational and advocacy capacities of local NGOs in refugee protection, integration, repatriation, emergency assistance and conflict prevention and resolution. A regional strategy for co-operation with NGOs will be developed to guide UNHCR's support to the NGO sector in the CIS countries. The strategy will focus on increasing the financial sustainability of NGOs, promoting appropriate legal frameworks for non-profit organisations, government-NGO co-operation, and capacity building.

In implementing these activities, UNHCR will closely cooperate with IOM, the OSCE and its institutions such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Council of Europe, other relevant UN agencies and NGO partners. These mutually reinforcing and complementary partnerships have been developed in recent years and have received renewed impetus with the decision to continue and reshape the Conference process.

BUDGET (USD)

Country	Annual Programme
Armenia	3,522,976
Azerbaijan	4,140,769
Belarus	797,885
Georgia	8,526,634
Republic of Moldova	1,050,970
Russian Federation	21,153,778
Ukraine	3,709,587
Regional Project ¹	102,900
Total	43,005,499

¹ Includes scholarships for refugee students in Eastern European Countries.