

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Review objectives

1 This review of UNHCR's programme in Azerbaijan was conducted from 21 to 25 February 2000. The objective of the review was to gain an insight into UNHCR's policies and programme performance, and to consider what support, if any, DFID should give to UNHCR in Azerbaijan.

The programme

2 Some 600,000 people in Azerbaijan are internally displaced as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from 1991-1994 and 210,000 are refugees (188,000 ethnic Azeris from Armenia and 33,000 Meskhetian Turks from Georgia and Uzbekistan).

3 UNHCR's programme focuses on long-staying IDPs, who live in the West and North West of Azerbaijan. It also provides limited assistance to the Meskhetian Turk refugees. In 2000, UNHCR has a budget of US\$4,676,373 to assist 97,000 IDPs as follows:

- ⇒ Provide material assistance to the most vulnerable IDPs and refugees to help their local integration, focusing on provision of shelter, health, education and income generation.
- ⇒ Increase the involvement of Government bodies and national NGOs in provision of assistance to IDPs and refugees, building capacity where necessary.
- ⇒ Hand over its material assistance programme to other multilateral agencies, Government bodies and local NGOs, with a view to withdrawing from material assistance altogether by 2002.
- ⇒ Continue providing legal protection to IDPs and refugees, focusing on helping the Government with refugee status determination procedures for asylum seekers.

Key findings and recommendations

Material assistance

4 UNHCR aims over time to reduce refugees' and IDPs' dependency on external assistance, to bring their living standards up to those of the host community, and to find durable solutions for them through local integration. The review team agrees with this policy, but judges that UNHCR should accelerate the hand-over of its implementation to its partners (including the Government) in Azerbaijan.

5 The team notes that IDPs in the south of Azerbaijan do not have adequate living conditions, and recommends that the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) improves its assistance to this group. The team judges that the likelihood of integration in Azerbaijan would be increased if UNHCR's implementing partners reviewed and revised their income-generation programmes, especially in areas where agricultural activities were not proving profitable.

Legal protection

6 UNHCR is carrying out some highly effective legal protection work, despite the weak government structures and systems with which it has to work. UNHCR has been instrumental in helping the Government of Azerbaijan to develop appropriate refugee and IDP laws, and has helped with refugee status determination procedures.

7 The review team recommends that UNHCR should continue this work, and should aim to increase its protection role after it has phased out of material assistance, to include monitoring of other agencies' programmes to ensure that they are meeting minimum standards for IDPs and refugees.

Phasing out

8 UNHCR has developed and is implementing a sound phase-out strategy, in which it aims to hand over its material assistance programmes to others, reducing its own role to one of just protection and advocacy from 2002 onwards. UNHCR also aims to increase involvement of national organisations (governmental and non-governmental) in assisting and protecting IDPs and refugees. The primary obstacle to successful progress on this strategy is lack of alternative funds for UNHCR's implementing partners. But UNHCR has also been constrained by the challenges of working with the Government of Azerbaijan, and by the lack of a fully established NGO sector in Azerbaijan.

9 The team encourages UNHCR to engage UNDP more actively in capacity building for national NGOs and Government, with a view to handing over this work completely by the beginning of 2002.

Recommendations for donor support

10 The team recommends that donors help UNHCR to phase out of material assistance by 2002, by gradually redirecting funds from UNHCR to its implementing partners, to reduce their financial dependency on UNHCR. We recommend that donors take forward this process in stages, in discussion with UNHCR and its partners about which of their projects are ready for independent funding, with UNHCR retaining a monitoring role.

11 In addition, we specifically recommend that DFID provides support to UNFPA (which is ready to take over UNHCR's reproductive health programme) and that DFID contracts a small business consultant to advise UNHCR and its partners on how best to take forward income-generation schemes in the area.