

# Strengthening Protection Capacity Project – South Caucasus

## Implementation Update - Armenia

December 2009

Strengthening Protection Capacity Project in the Southern Caucasus (SPCP-SC) to help strengthen protection responses to forced displacement in the region. In Armenia, the project helped UNHCR's efforts to build the Government's capacity to implement fair and effective asylum procedures, in particular in the context of the new asylum law.

The SPCP-SC initiative in Armenia has been supported by the European Commission and Danish Refugee Council. It built on previous initiatives which highlighted the need to amend and implement the refugee law in line with international standards, reinforce reception capacity, improve the accuracy and collection of data on refugees, as well as to enhance the socio-economic integration of naturalised refugees.

In implementing the project, UNHCR closely collaborated with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and local NGOs, including the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS).

### National Consultations

National Stakeholders Consultation to identify gaps in refugee protection and integration was held on 7-8 November 2008 with the participation of UN agencies, donors, Government of Armenia representatives, international and local NGOs and refugees. The consultations were based on UNHCR's refugee protection gap analysis. The consultations included workshops on admission, refugee status determination, status-related issues, health and gender based violence, social integration and economic integration as well as plenary sessions. Participants adopted a document identifying and prioritising protection gaps and recommendations to address the gaps in these areas. As a follow up to the Consultations, thematic meetings were organized in 2009 with all relevant stakeholders to jointly elaborate a Plan of Action to implement the National Consultation's recommendations.

PHOTOS: UNHCR



### Refugee law and regulations

A legal advisor worked with UNCR and the State Migration Agency (SMA) on several activities regarding the implementation of the new Law on Refugees and Asylum, such as drafting of and commenting on Governmental Decisions necessary for the full implementation of the new refugee law and identification of the relevant laws that should be amended in accordance with the new refugee law. Awareness raising tools were developed in this area for different audiences relevant to the protection of refugees.

## Reception centre

The expanded reception centre in Yerevan was inaugurated by UNHCR, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and State Migration Agency and EC Delegation in November. The Government of Armenia adopted a decree on the „procedure for functioning and maintenance of the reception center“. UNHCR and SMA are elaborating SOPs and house rules for the reception centre in line with the abovementioned decree’s requirements. A training on reception centre management was conducted in December.

PHOTO - UNHCR



## Improving registration systems

One of the protection gaps identified by the Government of Armenia, UNHCR and stakeholders was the absence of an electronic registration system. SPCP-SC supported the establishment of an electronic registration system in order to enhance the accurate storage and retrieval of refugee data, as well as easier analysis of vulnerabilities and protection needs among those of concern. The SMA staff members were trained in registering asylum seekers electronically in December.

## Refugee self reliance



PHOTO - UNHCR

The full integration of refugees and naturalized former refugees in Armenia remains challenging due to the difficult economic situation in the country. Increasing opportunities for self-reliance for refugees can expand the overall well-being of vulnerable households and foster greater social and economic participation within the community. A UNHCR consultant conducted a survey on urban refugee livelihoods, raising the crucial aspect of refugee local integration. Together with an earlier SPCP survey on rural refugee livelihoods, the survey provided a basis for discussing livelihoods at the follow up meetings to the National Consultations, and led to inclusion of key livelihoods issues in the Action Plan.

## Bi-lateral Meeting with UNHCR and Government entities

SPCP-SC helped UNHCR organising a roundtable on the protection of asylum seekers and refugees in Armenia and Georgia in Tbilisi on 16 December. Participants included experts from the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation of Georgia, Ministry of Territorial Administration of Armenia, UNHCR Armenia and Georgia offices and UNHCR’s implementing partners from both countries – UN Association of Georgia (UNAG), Mission Armenia, Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS), Chechen Refugee Council and Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF). Starting with presentations and debates in the plenary, the participants elaborated their conclusions and recommendations in working groups on legal and socio-economic integration issues. Conclusions of the roundtable included several issues of joint interest and action, such as cooperation on asylum management and exchange of best practices in refugee local integration.

The delegations requested UNHCR to continue its efforts in supporting both countries’ capacities to respond to the challenges of displacement, including through facilitating joint events such as study tours and NGO networking.