Azerbaijan
April 1, 2020

Since 1992, UNHCR has been supporting the Government of Azerbaijan to find durable solutions for refugees, displaced and stateless people in the country.

The majority of refugees do not have a clear legal status and are to a large extent depend on UNHCR for protection and assistance.

The inclusion of complementary protection into national legislation would increase the protection space by enabling persons of concern to secure a legal status and access to rights.

**POPULATION OF CONCERN**

- **Refugees** (Gov. and UNHCR 1 Apr. 2020): 1,138
- **Asylum seekers** (UNHCR, 1 Apr. 2020): 865
- **Internally displaced people** (Gov., 1 Jan 2020): 652,326
- **Stateless people** (Gov., 2009 Census): 3,585

**REGISTRATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS BY UNHCR**
(from 1 January 2010 to 1 April 2020)

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**REFUGEES BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (1 Apr. 2020)**

- Afghanistan: 640
- Russian Federation: 363
- Iran: 62
- Others: 73
- Refugees recognised by Government: 82 individuals (7% out of the total 1,138 refugees in the country)

**UNHCR PRESENCE**

**Staff:**
- 12 National Staff
- 4 International Staff
- 3 Affiliated workforce – national UNOPS

**Offices:**
- Country Office in Baku
  Winter Park Plaza, 4th floor, 210, M.Aliyev Street.
- Refugee Women and Youth Centre (RWYC) in Baku
  41, S.Mammadova Street.

www.unhcr.org
Working with Partners

UNHCR works closely with the UN and other international agencies, and several central government structures, including the Cabinet of Ministers Office, the State Migration Service, the State Committee for Affairs of Refugees and IDPs, and the State Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs. As part of the UN Country Team, UNHCR participates actively in the implementation of the United Nations – Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNHCR is represented in the Supervisory Board of the Social Development Fund for IDPs (SFDI) which is a semi-state agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan implementing large-scale IDP housing and development projects with funds allocated from various national and international entities. UNHCR community-based activities for refugees, including those carried-out in the Refugee Women and Youth Centre, are supported by charitable/philanthropic organisations.

Main Activities

Protection

UNHCR advocates with all relevant authorities and stakeholders to ensure compliance of refugee legislation with international standards, including the adoption of complementary forms of protection and universal access to refugee status determination procedures. UNHCR monitors access to asylum procedures and works to strengthen the quality of the Government’s asylum process by providing guidance on implementing international protection standards and by undertaking regular capacity development activities.

In view of the very low refugee status recognition rates by the governmental bodies observed over the last years, UNHCR conducts a parallel Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process. If the applicant is considered to be in need of international protection, UNHCR recognizes him/her under its mandate, and provides legal counselling and representation. Refugees recognized under UNHCR’s mandate, but not by the Government, are tolerated and generally protected from refoulement, but do not enjoy formal legal status. While they have access to free primary & secondary education and primary health care, they do not have the legal right to employment. Only those identified with specific need that is not addressed through existing programme are supported by UNHCR through Protection Cash Assistance.

According to governmental estimates there are still some 652,000 IDPs in the country. During the 1990s, along with emergency relief assistance, UNHCR implemented large-scale shelter, education, healthcare, water supply and sanitation programmes targeting mainly IDPs in partnership with other UN agencies. As the country experienced economic growth from the mid-2000s and the Government significantly increased investment in addressing the needs of IDPs, UNHCR gradually reduced its direct relief assistance to IDPs and reoriented its operations towards legal counselling, monitoring and advocacy for durable solutions. During the first two months of 2020 some 445 IDPs received legal assistance and counselling on issues such as personal documentation, social benefits and property rights. UNHCR also conducts capacity-building activities to prevent domestic and gender-based violence among IDPs.

UNHCR advocates with the Government of Azerbaijan to fully implement the Statelessness Conventions and to improve the existing national legislation related to citizenship. The office also provides individual assistance to stateless persons eligible to obtain documentation. As part of the UNHCR Global Campaign to End Statelessness, SMS launched a nationality determination campaign in 2016 to identify undocumented persons and provide them with an opportunity to access citizenship documentation. Since joining the UNHCR Global Statelessness Campaign, persons identified as stateless by the SMS started to be naturalized by the Citizenship Commission. In February 2020, 343 persons were granted with Azerbaijani citizenship by the Presidential Decree out of which 86 were stateless. During first three months of 2020, UNHCR assisted some 27 stateless persons through its Legal Assistance Project for stateless persons.

UNHCR provided technical assistance to the State Statistical Committee in the course of the preparation to the 2019 Census in order to ensure that stateless individuals are accurately identified and counted during the nation-wide exercise.

UNHCR supports the enhancement of national child protection systems through capacity building and direct support to unaccompanied minors and separated children including through access to guardianship and other services guided by the principle of the best interest of the child.

In March 2020, UNHCR had to reduce its reception and social activities at the Refugee Reception Centre as preventive measures against COVID-19 outbreak for public health purposes in line with the ongoing measures taken by the Government of Azerbaijan, as well as recommendations from World Health Organization and guidance from the UNHCR Headquarters.
Education
UNHCR’s education programme monitors and facilitates access of children from refugee and asylum seeker families to pre-school, primary and secondary education provided by the Government. As of early March, all school were closed in Azerbaijan as part of the measures against COVID-19 outbreak. The cooperation with the Azerbaijani Red Crescent Society, which offers regular language courses at the Refugee Women and Youth Centre for refugee and asylum seeker children, in order to enable them to be enrolled in public schools and attend classes, was also suspended until further notice. UNHCR provides support to tertiary education of talented young refugees, through the DAIF (Albert Einstein German Academic Initiative) Scholarship Programme, funded by the German Federal Government. UNHCR provides support to refugees and asylum seekers to enable them to benefit from online education services during the Covid-19 crises period.

Health
UNHCR interventions in the provision of primary health care are limited to monitoring of public health facilities to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers have access to services as locals. The results of the monitoring activities showed that newly arrived asylum seekers face a language barrier, need special attention and support to pass registration, be able to express their complaints and receive necessary treatment. Pregnant women also need additional support from UNHCR to receive free access to gynaecological consultations. Provision of essential drugs is handled through a contracted pharmacy.
UNHCR provides free secondary health care services to registered refugees and asylum seekers through contracted service providers. The scope of services includes access to secondary care, psychological services, provision of drugs, voluntary HIV testing and awareness-raising on health issues. Persons of concern suffering from oncological diseases are entitled to benefit from the free of charge blood test services through the specialized national healthcare facility. As of April, no case of COVID-19 has been reported/identified among the refugees and asylum-seekers.

Cash Based Interventions (CBIs)
UNHCR’s CBI programme in Azerbaijan ensures that basic needs of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers are met by having access to sufficient food, housing and utilities. Taking into consideration that the vast majority of refugees enjoy limited livelihood opportunities mainly due to lack of right to legal employment, refugee and asylum seeker households receive Multi-Purpose Cash Grants from UNHCR on the basis of socio-economic vulnerability which are identified through regularly conducted household surveys. UNHCR is advocating with the Government to provide for the right to work for all refugees in the country at the legislative and practical administrative level. Owing to budgetary considerations and in order to promote self-reliance and assumption of greater responsibility by the Government, the targeting criteria were revised on the basis of specific/protection needs and the percentage of beneficiaries was substantially reduced at the beginning of 2020.

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance
UNHCR maintains communication with persons of concern in order to improve their knowledge on their rights and duties and on available services and to ensure that they have access to the information necessary to make informed decisions affecting their future.
UNHCR is pursuing available livelihood opportunities aimed at assisting Government recognized refugee families in becoming self-sufficient. In order to allow refugees to achieve self-sufficiency and full access to social, economic and cultural rights UNHCR advocates for mainstreaming them in national and local development programmes. Currently, access to legal, decent employment remains restricted for the vast majority of refugees.

COVID-19 emergency interventions
Following the introduction of a series of measures by the Government aimed at mitigating the risk of spreading COVID-19 in Azerbaijan, UNHCR and State Migration Service (SMS) discussed a number of measures aimed at maintaining protection space for Persons of Concern (PoCs) in line with international law and standards. For example, Temporary Asylum Certificates which are about to expire will be extended until the end of May and shared with the respective PoCs electronically. Rejected asylum-seekers can submit their administrative appeal applications through the SMS website or by email. UNHCR has agreed to share electronic copies of its extended protection letters and refugee cards with SMS in order to be registered electronically in the system. UNHCR is in regular contact with SMS and closely monitors the application of the newly introduced measures by the Government. The Head of SMS assured the UNHCR Representative that nobody under UNHCR’s mandate will be expelled because of lack of up to date documentation.

While all non-essential protection activities by UNHCR have been scaled down, protection counselling, legal assistance and extension of protection documentation to PoCs is maintained through phone, WhatsApp and email. Sharing of extended UNHCR protection letters and refugee cards with PoCs and State Migration Service continues
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electronically. All relevant information about the new modus operandi and contact details has been communicated to the State Migration Service and refugee community leaders.

As a result of UNHCR advocacy interventions, the host community in Azerbaijan started to donate food and other daily consumables to UNHCR Azerbaijan for distribution to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. In March, about 30 vulnerable families benefited from such assistance, while some 62 additional food packages were prepared for home delivery in early April 2020.

UNHCR received assurances that refugees and asylum-seekers will be included in the governmental health response to the COVID-19 emergency, as part of the primary health care.

UNHCR has also written to the Government appealing to include refugees and asylum-seekers in whatever measures will be adopted to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 situation.

UNHCR has initiated a reprioritization of funds to provide emergency and time-limited financial assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers who were largely relying on the informal sector for their livelihoods which was disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 emergency.

Durable Solutions

Together with the Government and partners, UNHCR works towards the integration of refugees in Azerbaijan by advocating access to legal employment and self-employment. The recommendations for a Roadmap to Refugee Integration Policy in Azerbaijan were presented during a workshop to members of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Socioeconomic Integration of Refugees. UNHCR will work with the Working Group to implement the recommendations of the Roadmap and to help to build the capacity of the local authorities by proposing an integration model. UNHCR has also developed a socio-economic strategy for refugee integration in Azerbaijan which aims at building human capital and resilience among refugees, particularly youth, through fostering livelihood opportunities and skills training in partnership with development agencies. UNHCR also advocates for durable solutions for IDPs, including the right to return on a voluntary basis.

External / Donor Relations

UNHCR seeks to use strategic communication to support persons of concern and to create a more receptive host environment. This is done through raising awareness of UNHCR’s protection and solutions mandate in various media, including social media, and by means of public information products and community outreach.

Through communication with persons of concern, their knowledge of their rights and duties and of available services is enhanced, thereby ensuring they have access to the information necessary to make informed decisions affecting their future.

UNHCR relies almost entirely on voluntary contributions from governments, UN and pooled funding mechanisms, international financial institutions and the private sector. It works all year round to raise funds for its programmes and addresses new emergencies as they occur.

The overall budget of USD 2.79 million has initially been distributed among the different programmes: 2.0 million (72%) allocated to refugees and asylum-seekers, USD 693,461 (25%) for IDPs and USD 81,215 (3%) for stateless people.

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who contributed to this operation with un-earmarked and (softly) earmarked funds in 2019 and expresses its special thanks to the governments of the United States of America, European Union, Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Italy, Finland and private donors of Australia, Germany, Italy, Republic of Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and Japan.

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LINKS

UNHCR global website: https://www.unhcr.org/
UN Azerbaijan website: http://unazerbaijan.org/en/un_agencies/united-nations-high-commissioner-for-refugees/
Facebook: www.facebook.com/unhcr.azerbaijan/
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