

Azerbaijan

February 1, 2021

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

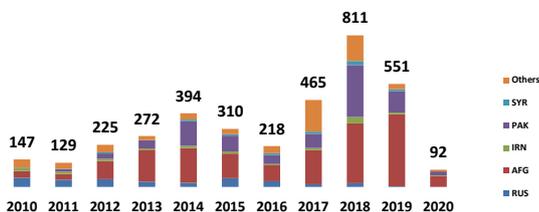
The majority of refugees do not have a clear legal status but since 2020 have legal access to the labour market.

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

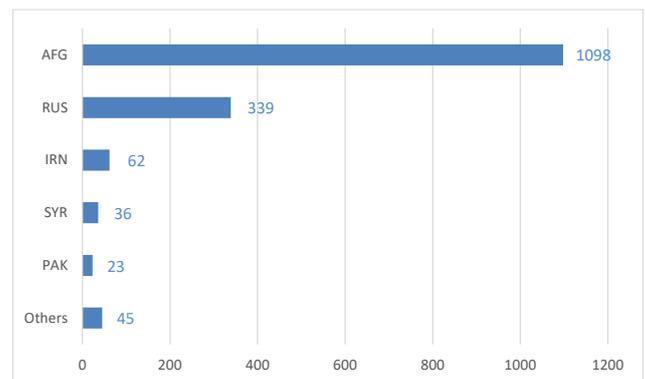
POPULATION OF CONCERN

Refugees (Gov. and UNHCR 1 Feb. 2021)	- 1,603
Asylum seekers (UNHCR, 1 Feb. 2021)	- 284
Internally displaced (Gov, 1 Jan. 2021)	- 653,921
Stateless people (Gov., 2009 Census)	- 3,585

REGISTRATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS BY UNHCR (from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2020)



REFUGEES BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (1 Feb. 2021)



Refugees recognized by Government: 78 individuals
(5% out of the total 1,603 refugees in the country)

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff: 25 in total

National Staff	- 15
International Staff	- 5
Affiliated workforce national UNOPS	- 5

Offices:

Country Office in Baku

Winter Park Plaza,
210, M. Aliyev Street.

Refugee Women and Youth Centre

41, S. Mammadova Street



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

Working with Partners

UNHCR works closely with other UN and 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, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, 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 in the design of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. Many UNHCR community-based activities for refugees, including that carried-out in the Refugee Women and Youth Centre, are supported by charitable/philanthropic organizations.

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 (RSD) procedures. UNHCR monitors access to asylum procedures and works to strengthen the quality of the Government's asylum process by guiding on implementing international protection standards and by undertaking regular capacity development activities, refugee status recognition rates by the governmental bodies have remained very low even though most asylum-seekers come from "refugee-producing countries".

If the applicant is considered to be in need of international protection, UNHCR 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. Refugees and asylum seekers have access to free primary & secondary education and primary health care. Despite the lack of a proper legal status, thanks to UNHCR advocacy and governmental goodwill, these refugees can now conclude labour contracts following the successful implementation of the pledge made by the Government in the first Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva in December 2019. Only those identified with specific needs that are not addressed through existing programs are supported by UNHCR through Multi-Purpose Cash Grants.

If referred to government statistics, there are still some 653,921 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. Since UNHCR is expected to exercise its supervisory role concerning returns as per the 9 November 2020 trilateral ceasefire statement, it will be primarily involved in analysis, legal/policy/ advice, including advocating for the voluntariness of returns and that these are taking place in safety and dignity.

During 2020, some 1,445 IDPs received legal assistance and counselling on issues such as personal documentation, social benefits, and property rights. In late December 2020, the Executive Power Office of the war-affected Agdam district distributed 133 UNHCR donated dignity (sanitary) kits among the girls and women in the communities suffering from the recent hostilities within the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

UNHCR advocates with the Government to implement fully the Statelessness Conventions and to improve the existing legislation related to citizenship. As part of the UNHCR Global Campaign (#IBELONG) to End Statelessness, SMS launched a nationality determination campaign in 2016 to identify and document stateless persons. Within the campaign, UNHCR published a leaflet in December 2020 in partnership with the SMS and the Ombudsperson Office to raise awareness of stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness on where to go for help to find a durable solution to their plight. During 2015-2020, UNHCR provided free legal assistance to more than 200 stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness and assisted in paying state duties and legal costs to facilitate the naturalization of more than 100 vulnerable groups.

In 2019, the Government of Azerbaijan pledged at the High-level Segment on Statelessness to ensure the naturalization of the registered stateless persons within the next three years. In order to monitor the implementation of the pledges, and also to facilitate the exchange of information among the key stakeholders, a working group (WG) consisted of representatives from all relevant central executive authorities was established. The first meeting of the WG took place on 22 September where the WG's Terms of Reference was endorsed and the participants agreed to convene every quarter.

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.

Since March 2020, UNHCR had to reduce its physical reception and social activities at the Refugee Reception Centre as preventive measures against the COVID-19 outbreak, particularly for public health purposes in line with the ongoing measures taken by the Government of Azerbaijan, as well as recommendations from World Health Organization. Instead, the Office introduced counselling lines on protection and social issues, remote enrolment of asylum seekers as well as electronic documentation with asylum certificates and refugee protection cards.

Education

UNHCR maintains close cooperation with the relevant authorities and directly with the schools to ensure free and equal access of the refugee and asylum seeker children to pre-school, primary, and secondary education. In 2020, in total 30 schools were monitored and information collected on the challenges related to conducting classes in online mode in the circumstances emerged through the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent restriction imposed by the authorities. UNHCR provides support to refugees and asylum seekers to enable them to benefit from online education services during the Covid-19 crisis period. In line with this purpose, the agency purchased 378 tablets and distributed them among the school-age refugee and asylum seeker children in early January 2021. UNHCR provides support to tertiary education of talented young refugees mainly through the DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Initiative) Scholarship Programme. Since 2010, in total 36 refugee students have benefitted from the Program. In 2020, UNHCR also covered tuition fee expenses of additional 33 refugee and asylum seeker students and provided them with one-off cash assistance.

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.

In anticipation of the implementation of Mandatory Health Insurance, 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. During 2020, some 690 referrals to secondary healthcare services were arranged by UNHCR through covering the executed expenses. 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 1 February, 26 COVID-19 cases had been reported/identified among the refugees and asylum-seekers in Azerbaijan out of which 22 had recovered, three passed away and one was under treatment.

Cash-Based Interventions (CBIs)

UNHCR's CBI program in Azerbaijan ensures that basic needs of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers are met by having access to sufficient food, housing, and utilities. The percentage of the CBI beneficiaries substantially reduced at the beginning of 2020 when the Government adopted the policy of enabling refugees to become self-reliant through engagement in legal (self) employment.

However, the lockdown measures due to the Covid-19 pandemic started in early 2020, caused additional hardships for refugees as they lost minimal and often inadequate source of income, mainly coming from informal jobs in construction sites, small trade points, etc. Many refugees and asylum-seekers found themselves under the threat of eviction due to the inability to cover their monthly running costs such as rent and utilities.

In order to address the deteriorated economic situation of refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR Azerbaijan delivered emergency financial assistance to the affected people. In April – May 2020, some 354 households, in August – September 317 households were supported with emergency cash distribution, while by the end of the year the remaining 392 households were targeted.

Emergency response to humanitarian consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

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 discussed several measures aimed at maintaining protection space for Persons of Concern (PoCs) in line with international law and standards. In this regard, UNHCR provided the necessary technical support to remodel and equip its interviewing space, which would create a conducive environment for interviewees and interviewers from both health and registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD) perspectives. Along with this, the support also included a Dactyloscopy scanner for the collection and processing of biometric data from new asylum seekers. SMS also introduced online services to ensure documentation of asylum-seekers, enabling rejected asylum-seekers to lodge administrative appeal applications through its website or by email. All relevant information about the new modus operandi and contact details has been communicated to the State Migration Service and refugee community leaders.

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, including the vaccination against Covid-19 on an equal basis with the Azerbaijani citizens.

As a result of UNHCR advocacy interventions, governmental structures, civil society organizations, private sector companies, and benevolent individuals in Azerbaijan started to donate food and other

daily consumables to UNHCR Azerbaijan for distribution to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. By 1 February 2021, in total 2,014 parcels of food and other daily consumables donated by various actors had been distributed to the vulnerable refugee, asylum seeker, and stateless families.

In the second half of December 2020, 129 young female refugees and asylum seekers received dignity (sanitary) kits purchased by UNHCR.

UNHCR Azerbaijan purchased 378 tablets and distributed them among the school-age refugee and asylum seeker children in early January. Together with the tablets, the beneficiaries received school kits donated by the HOMS (heads of mission spouses) back in September 2020. In total 377 out of the total 400 kits were distributed during the period.

Emergency response to humanitarian consequences of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict

UNHCR, together with other UN agencies, delivered humanitarian assistance to the people affected by the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, which occurred between September and November 2020. In December 2020, UNHCR Azerbaijan received 9 trucks containing 30,000 high-thermal blankets, 4,000 kitchen sets, and 50 rolls (in total 10,000 square meters) of plastic tarpaulins, as well as started local procurement of 15,000 mattresses, 25,000 pillows, and 443 dignity (sanitary) kits. The major part of these relief items was delivered to the Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society and the local authorities of Agdam and Agjabadi districts during December 2020 – January 2021 for further distribution to the war-affected people. The second batch of the UNHCR donated relief items is expected to arrive in Azerbaijan in late February 2021 in 16 trucks.

In January 2021, UNHCR Azerbaijan received 10,000 pairs of textile gloves donated by the Swedish company Hestra. Some 8,000 pairs were allocated for the distribution to children in the war-affected communities in partnership with the ASAN Volunteers, a Public entity with support by UNICEF.

UNHCR cooperates closely with the State Committee for Refugees and IDPs and other governmental bodies by providing policy advice and documentation to discharge its supervisory role on IDPs return as per the trilateral ceasefire statement of 9 November signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia.

Durable Solutions

As a result of fruitful cooperation, technical support, and capacity development activities, over the past years, there have been many positive developments in the national asylum procedure in line with international standards that further emphasize the Government's primary role in protecting and securing durable solutions for refugees. Facilitation of legal employment and access to labour market for refugees was an important pledge made by the Azerbaijani delegation at the Global Refugee Forum, which took place in December 2019 and was a true milestone in building solidarity with the world's refugees and the countries and communities that host them. During the months following the Global Refugee Forum, the State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan engaged with the Ministry of Labour and other state entities to ensure the implementation of the pledge.

As a result, as of mid-June 2020, refugees and asylum-seekers in Azerbaijan can apply for individual identification numbers, which is essential to get their labour contracts registered. Now, the Government of Azerbaijan is addressing the issue of access to legal employment, which will allow the refugees in the country to become self-sufficient and pay taxes instead of relying upon only informal employment and humanitarian assistance. This will be a major step forward on the road to inclusion and integration. Because of the mentioned breakthrough, more than 200 refugees could get individual identification numbers and some 12 refugees were able to conclude labour contracts in 2020.

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 utilizing public information products and community outreach.

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

In November 2020, upon UNHCR's request, the Government of Azerbaijan allocated an additional warehouse space in the size of 1,200 square meters to UNHCR for storing emergency core relief items brought to the country to assist war-affected people.

In 2020, UNHCR Azerbaijan spent 2.8 million USD to its operation, explicitly 1.25 million USD on activities for the refugees and asylum-seekers, 23 thousand USD on the statelessness, and 1.55 million on the IDP programs.

UNHCR highly appreciates the critical support provided by the donors who contributed to this operation with un-earmarked and (softly) earmarked funds. UNHCR 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/

Instagram: www.instagram.com/unhcr_azerbaijan/

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/AzerbaijanUnhcr>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOZLvTQq3yVgrUuy9QcgIIMA/about>