

CENTRAL EUROPE

Austria,
Bulgaria,
Czech Republic,
Estonia,

Hungary,
Latvia,
Lithuania,
Poland,

Romania,
Slovakia,
Slovenia.

CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALTIC STATES REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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continue. Governments in Central Europe have welcomed UNHCR's comments on draft legislation and have recognised that amendments are highly relevant to the process of accession to the European Union. Cooperation will continue with government counterparts, parliamentarians and ombudsmen to promote the legislative and accession processes.

Strategic Objectives

The overall objectives of UNHCR's work in Central Europe and the Baltic States are essentially the same as in Western Europe; to collaborate with governments in the development of policies, the setting of standards and the solving of problems; and to ensure that collective efforts respond to the protection needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection. Implementation strategies differ, however, as they take into account different levels of development of refugee legislation, eligibility procedures, reception facilities and support systems. While UNHCR support will be tailored to the specific needs of each country, region-wide coordination will remain essential to ensure that asylum systems develop in a consistent manner in all countries concerned. UNHCR and individual states are, furthermore, aware of the need to integrate their efforts into a Europe-wide strategy, with a view to the eventual enlargement of the European Union to include Central Europe and the Baltic States.

Recent Developments

Progress has been made in ensuring that asylum systems in Central Europe provide protection, assistance and durable solutions for asylum-seekers and refugees in line with international standards. Legal frameworks have been set up in conformity with international norms and principles and the process of refining legislation will

Operations

Cooperation with, and Advice to, Governments

UNHCR remains committed to building the capacity of those state institutions directly responsible for receiving asylum-seekers, processing their applications and deciding on refugee status. The high turnover of civil servants strongly suggests that training efforts should concentrate on improving curricula at training institutes, rather than on workshops conducted by UNHCR and partners.

Areas in need of legislative improvement across the region include access of asylum-seekers to the territory; reception at airports; mechanisms for independent appeal or review and temporary protection in situations of large-scale influx. For the latter, the experience gained by governments who have assisted Bosnians and Kosovars will be relevant. In the recent Kosovo Emergency, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic accepted nearly 3,000 Kosovars under UNHCR's Humanitarian Evacuation Programme and all countries of the region helped thousands more by keeping their borders open and waiving visa requirements.

Promotion and Advocacy

Support and advice to governments in the region, which have recently embraced internationally recognised principles for dealing with refugee problems, must be supplemented by activities aimed at raising awareness among decision-makers, pressure groups, the media and the public at large. Public information will remain, therefore, a critical component of UNHCR's action.

Advocacy of the principles of refugee law will be situated within a broad human rights context. Beyond promoting accession to the international instruments on statelessness, UNHCR will continue to promote the welfare of stateless and minority groups in refugee-like situations in the region, as well as gender equity. Surveys will be updated or undertaken to determine the needs of refugee women. Support will be provided for women entrepreneurs and networking with groups of national women will be encouraged. General and specific human rights training will be encouraged and groups, such as the Roma, are expected to benefit.

UNHCR will seek to enhance understanding of humanitarian principles on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, through special events and increased media coverage of refugee issues.

Partnerships and Networking

Initiatives to build capacity and to raise awareness will, for the most part, be cooperative efforts involving the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe or other relevant institutions. UNHCR will also develop its partnerships with an increasing number of NGOs in Central Europe and the Baltic States. These partnerships will play an important role in the following areas: monitoring reception centres; legal and psychological counselling for asylum-seekers; advocacy; and integration of refugees. The establishment of human rights centres/legal clinics in universities will be promoted so as to reinforce networks of lawyers. Law students in these centres generally have more time than professional lawyers to devote to research and follow-up of individual precedent-setting cases.

The European Commission's PHARE Horizontal Programme, which is co-managed by UNHCR, provides a unique framework for efforts to build capacity. This programme will continue to help governments plan changes intended to bring their asylum systems up to European and international standards. It will involve workshops, study tours and twinning arrangements at the technical level, as well as the endorsement of plans during round-table discussions. Although its main thrust is to share the experience gained in western countries with governments, the judiciary and NGOs in Central Europe, a fringe benefit will clearly be a greater awareness of refugee issues among Western European experts participating in the programme.

As governments in Central Europe and the Baltic States become more aware of the support that NGOs can bring to refugee programmes, UNHCR will continue to improve cooperation among NGOs and help to enhance their management, advocacy and fund-raising skills to render them as independent as possible in the long-term. To this end, UNHCR will liaise with potential donors or western NGOs interested in twinning arrangements, in conjunction with the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE).

Solutions

One of UNHCR's main objectives in Central Europe and the Baltic States will be to ensure that governments establish support programmes aimed at integrating recognised refugees into society. Gender and age-sensitivity will also need to be fully incorporated into the planning processes.

Language training, accommodation, health care, cultural orientation, access to education and employment will form the basis of integration programmes. If housing outside a capital city is less expensive, efforts will be made to work with municipal authorities to identify appropriate accommodation for refugees. Some of the most successful integration efforts have been, and will continue to be, those involving both nationals and refugees, whereby the latter are genuinely recognised as “new citizens”.

Contacts will be made with training institutes, magistrates, police, border guards, social workers, journalists, interpreters, teachers and others whose work entails involvement with human rights and refugee issues. Training programmes in one country can serve as models for similar training in other countries of the region or beyond.

CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALTIC STATES

BUDGET (USD)

Country	Annual Programme
Austria	1,864,391
Baltic States	498,000
Bulgaria	902,478
Czech Republic	733,431
Hungary	1,387,429
Latvia	323,989
Poland	811,071
Romania	1,187,421
Slovak Republic	742,713
Slovenia	1,460,974
Regional Project*	800,000
Sub-total	10,711,897
Bureau at Headquarters	473,800
Total	11,185,697

* Covers promotion of refugee law in countries in Central Europe and the Baltic States

