



Central Europe and the Baltic States

Recent developments

During the first six months of 2004, some 15,000 asylum applications were recorded in Central Europe and the Baltic States, marking a 6.7 per cent increase on the comparable period in 2003. While the figures remained largely unchanged for most of Central Europe, a few countries experienced remarkable increases in asylum applications. For example, during the same periods, some 500 cases in Cyprus in 2003 soared to over 3,200 new cases in 2004; and Slovakia registered an 88 per cent increase, from over 3,300 applicants in 2003 to some 6,300 in 2004. On the other hand, countries such as Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic recorded decreases of 47 per cent, 36 per cent, and 31 per cent respectively.

The long-awaited enlargement of the European Union (EU) finally took place on 1 May 2004, with ten new States acceding to membership. This chapter briefly examines nine of the ten new EU Member States (Malta excluded). In terms of their asylum systems, this remains a heterogeneous group. Having surmounted the major challenge of meeting the pre-accession requirements of the EU

Bulgaria
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Estonia
Hungary
Latvia
Lithuania
Poland
Romania
Slovakia
Slovenia
Turkey



acquis, the new Member States are now turning their attention to the practical details, i.e. incorporating the relevant EU Directives into domestic law. At the same time, the new Member States are introducing structural changes which will enable them to deal better with asylum-seekers.

In 2004, the new EU Member States greatly feared the risk of immediate post-accession applicability of Dublin II in the form of a tidal wave of returning asylum-seekers. Before accession, it was predicted that this would ensue from the implementation of the safe third country principle enshrined in Dublin II, as well as various bilateral readmission agreements.

In addition to these issues, most of the new EU Member States continued to deal with pre-existing challenges regarding the reception of asylum-seekers, RSD procedures, and the integration of refugees. Some of the new EU Member States have already made significant progress in improving reception conditions and enhancing their RSD structures and capacities, while others are only beginning to put those structures in place. UNHCR will continue to assist the new EU

Member States in developing their asylum systems and will focus in 2005 on the translation of EU law into domestic law, and its implementation.

Strategic objectives

UNHCR's aims in this region are four-fold. Firstly, UNHCR offices in the region work towards ensuring that asylum-seekers and persons in need of international protection have access to the territories of European States, and to fair, efficient and effective asylum procedures. Secondly, UNHCR will strive to ensure that refugees are treated in accordance with international protection standards and, to promote effective durable solutions, including integration. Thirdly, the Office will try to ensure that developing asylum systems achieve international

standards of legislation and practice. Fourthly, UNHCR will strive to deepen public understanding of the refugees' need for protection and a lasting solution.

UNHCR will reposition its field presence in areas where it is most needed, particularly along the new EU borders. In January 2005 it will open its first Regional Office in Central Europe, based in Hungary, and covering Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Operations

Information on UNHCR's operations in **Turkey** is provided separately in the next chapter. This section covers the rest of Central Europe and the Baltic States.

Access to asylum systems and procedures

The simplest and starkest implication of EU enlargement for refugee protection in Europe, and UNHCR's work, is the shift to the east and

south-east of a very long stretch of the EU's external border. This has not merely expanded the EU asylum space, but has also placed more control in the hands of the new Member States, as many of the major entry points into the EU are now on their national territories.

UNHCR will continue to subordinate its strategy for regional asylum capacity building in favour of its broader migration management and international protection framework. The Office will also continue to monitor measures taken by the relevant Central European States to strengthen their external borders, in order to ensure that these measures do not restrict access for persons in need of international protection. Finally, UNHCR will strive to assist in the development of asylum systems that are sensitive to the situation on both sides of the new border. The Office will also promote recognition of its role as the lead agency responsible for ensuring coherent management of asylum within the EU and beyond.

Strengthening asylum systems

With the shift of the external EU border, access to European Union territory and to asylum procedures will to a large extent depend on policies and procedures in the new EU member countries. UNHCR considers this a matter of concern and will continue to play a lead role in fostering dialogue on both sides of the new external border of the EU, and to ensure that recent strides made in protecting access to territory are not lost in the process.

Although progress made in strengthening the quality and capacity of the newly emerging Central European asylum systems has been encouraging, much still remains to be done. UNHCR will therefore continue to build on recent achievements in the region, sharing lessons learned and best protection practices. For instance, best practices in reception of asylum-seekers and RSD procedures will be promoted, with a view to fixing standards at the highest levels, thus harmonizing upwards as opposed to downwards. UNHCR will also ensure prominence for gender issues as well as problems

facing separated refugee and asylum-seeking children.

Public information, advocacy and partnerships

As part of its efforts to promote sustainable asylum systems, UNHCR will continue to mobilize support for refugee integration, which remains an integral and vital part of the asylum procedure. The Office will maintain and where necessary enhance its public information tools and expand awareness campaigns and media events to bring the plight of refugees to the attention of target audiences, as well as to highlight their contribution to their host communities.

UNHCR's advocacy strategy will consist of focused meetings, thematic workshops and seminars, the production and distribution of training materials and general information exchange targeting decision-makers, the media and lobby groups.

The Office will continue to maintain reasonable levels of support for NGO implementing partners, while assisting them in their efforts to diversify their sources of funding by taking advantage of various EU funding mechanisms.

Resource mobilization

A number of Central European States have stepped up their contributions to UNHCR through unearmarked contributions, direct funding to specific operations, as well as through provision of free office space to UNHCR. They are increasingly supporting UNHCR's activities to protect refugees and other persons of concern, in Europe and elsewhere. Based on the positive results achieved in the last two years, UNHCR will continue its efforts to increase the involvement of the new EU member States in UNHCR's activities, in Geneva, in the capitals and in the field. With the objective of increasing its donor base, UNHCR will continue to promote a gradual but steady approach to the 30 per cent baseline funding level, confident in the endorsement that this concept has so far received from most of the new EU Member States. UNHCR will build on these achievements and will seek to broaden avenues of support for refugees. UNHCR



Czech Republic: Chechen asylum-seekers at the Vysni Lhoty reception centre for new arrivals, in northern Moravia (close to the Polish and Slovak border). *UNHCR / L. Taylor*

will continue its advocacy among governments, organizations, and private individuals and corporations in the region to encourage them to increase their levels of funding for its operations.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Bulgaria	986,647
Cyprus	677,962
Czech Republic	847,714
Hungary	2,139,098
Poland	764,115
Romania	1,033,983
Slovakia	758,961
Slovenia	654,103
Turkey	6,275,605
Regional activities ¹	330,000
Total	14,468,189

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¹Includes promotion of refugee law and emergency preparedness.