



Central Europe and Baltic States

Bulgaria
Czech Republic
Estonia
Hungary
Latvia
Lithuania
Poland
Romania
Slovak Republic
Slovenia
Turkey

Working environment

The integration of foreigners and refugees is a controversial subject in much of Central Europe, which has seen a rising tide of xenophobia and discrimination towards minority groups, and in particular towards Roma communities. Nonetheless, some governments have increased local integration opportunities for recognized refugees, and in some cases have even agreed to offer resettlement to refugees recognized elsewhere.

In 2008, two UNHCR regional offices will continue to cover Central Europe and the Baltic States. The Regional Office in Budapest will oversee UNHCR's operations in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The Regional Office in Stockholm will be the platform for UNHCR operations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, in addition to its responsibilities for the Nordic countries.



Strategy

UNHCR will advocate for the strengthening of refugee protection and unfettered access to asylum in the Central European and Baltic region. External EU borders will be monitored through accords such as those signed with Hungary and the Slovak Republic. The UNHCR 10-Point Plan of Action provides a framework to address the migration asylum nexus.

The Office will strive to develop critical partnerships involving Governments, regional institutions and NGOs. It will provide input into States' practices and policies returns and readmission and the transposition of EU directives into national legislation. The Office seeks to improve monitoring and to review judicial processes in order to set precedents and best practice. It also strives to improve the daily lives of refugees.

UNHCR will urge States to accede to and implement the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It will support processes which seek to enhance cooperation at the borders of the European Union member States, including the Baltic countries.

Constraints

NGOs and civil society in the region remain weak and are frequently dependent on external funding. As such, they are unable to generate the matching contributions required to receive EU funds.

Socio-economic pressures create a receptive environment for messages which degrade foreigners, rendering efforts to improve conditions for asylum-seekers and refugees increasingly difficult. The rhetoric on immigration and asylum complicates UNHCR's efforts to strengthen asylum and safeguard protection.

Efforts to reduce illegal migration and the imposition of strict border controls hinder unfettered access of people who wish to seek asylum to proper procedures.

Operations

Information on UNHCR's operations in Turkey is provided separately in the next chapter.



UNHCR/B. Szandelszky

An asylum-seeker from Chechnya participates in a tailoring course in a reception centre in Lulin, Poland.

Access to asylum systems and procedures

In Central Europe, activities to uphold the principle of *non-refoulement* and access to asylum procedures will include systematic border monitoring at various entry points. Regular contact will be maintained with border guards and other law-enforcement officers, who will also be offered training in refugee-related issues. The implementation of readmission agreements and the Dublin II Agreement will be closely monitored.

In the Baltic countries, UNHCR will advocate the accession to and/or implementation of the 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness and enhance cross-border cooperation.

Strengthening asylum

UNHCR will seek to ensure that asylum systems put in place over the past several years are maintained and improved. Concerns over illegal migration and security

threats have led to tighter border controls. This, coupled with the transposition of EU asylum directives into national legislation, increases the risk that asylum systems may become more restrictive. UNHCR will remain vigilant to ensure that asylum is preserved in the region.

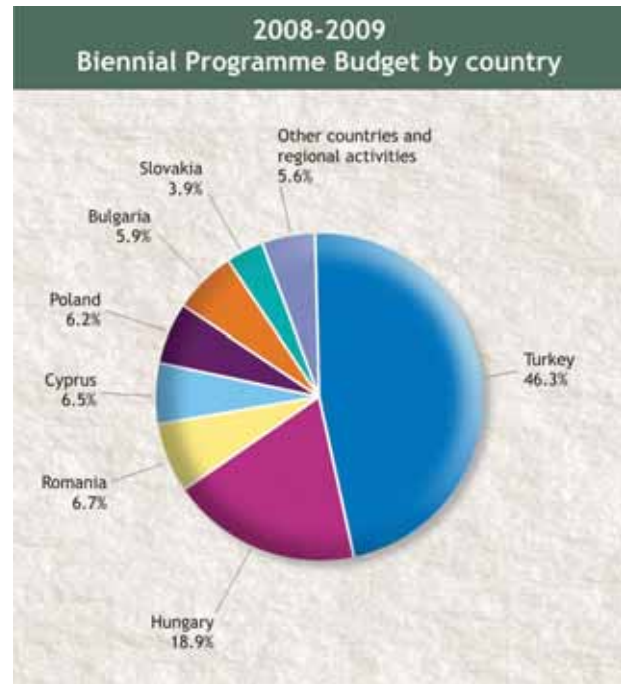
Following the gradual expansion of the Schengen area to the Baltic States, UNHCR will maintain a close monitoring role to ensure high-quality refugee status determination procedures and decision-making.

Search for durable solutions

Recognized refugees and people holding subsidiary protection status face a myriad of challenges to locally integrate such as learning national languages, finding employment, acquiring accommodation, and gaining access to social services and benefits. The participatory needs assessment undertaken in 2007 indicates that countries in Central Europe and the Baltics continue to be perceived as transit rather

than destination countries by asylum-seekers and refugees due to the limited opportunities for local integration. UNHCR will continue to advocate for governments, NGOs and refugees to work together to improve opportunities and sustainability of local integration.

In Central Europe, Romania has taken an important first step by establishing a resettlement programme. Other countries are also considering the establishment of legal and administrative frameworks to accept refugees for resettlement. Slovenia has proposed resettlement provisions in its new draft asylum law. In 2008, UNHCR will share its expertise with the Central European and Baltic States and advocate for additional resettlement opportunities.



Budget (USD)					
Country	2007			2008	2009
	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Annual Programme Budget
Bulgaria	846,372	0	846,372	769,887	707,932
Cyprus	710,813	0	710,813	812,369	812,370
Czech Republic	420,643	0	420,643	363,526	367,426
Hungary	2,060,516	0	2,060,516	2,365,178	2,369,277
Poland	807,938	0	807,938	827,981	718,797
Romania	979,681	0	979,681	870,022	796,770
Slovakia	496,666	0	496,666	515,324	469,615
Slovenia	194,000	0	194,000	184,299	184,299
Turkey	6,716,171	1,489,621	8,205,792	5,535,009	6,059,897
Regional activities ¹	240,000	0	240,000	100,000	210,000
Total	13,472,800	1,489,621	14,962,421	12,343,595	12,696,383

¹ Includes promotion of refugee law.

Note: The Supplementary Programme Budget excludes a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.