

# Europe

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Eastern Europe

South-Eastern Europe

Central Europe and  
the Baltic States

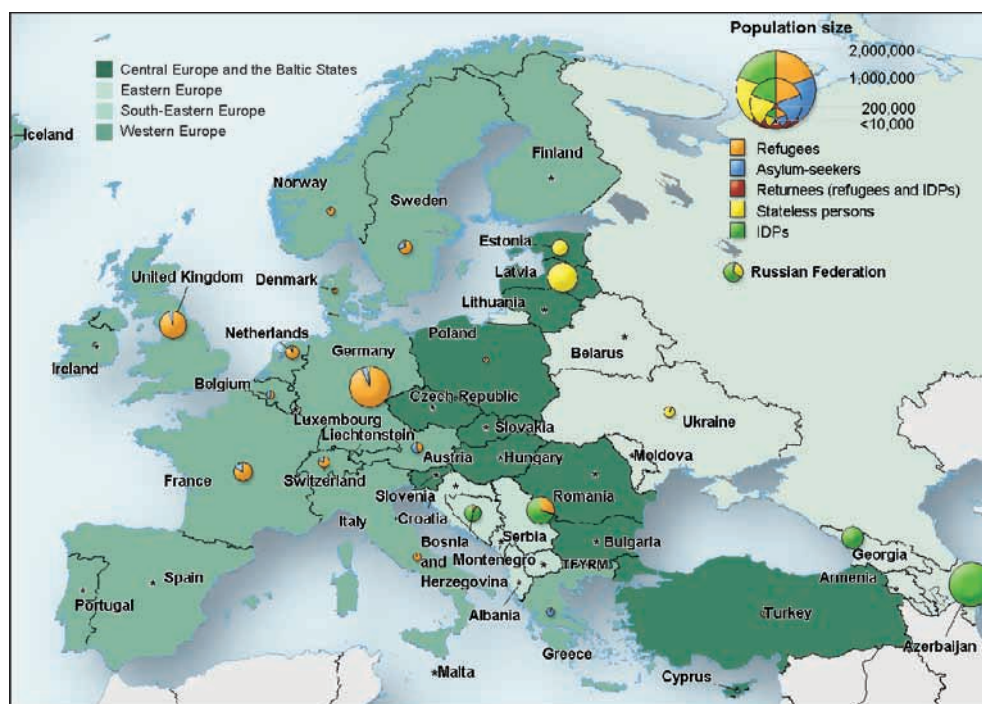
Western Europe



# Europe

## Working environment

UNHCR works in the areas of protection, advocacy, capacity building and resource mobilization in 48 countries in Europe. As events and attitudes in the region influence global support for international protection, the Office strives to reinforce high standards, particularly with regard to access, asylum procedures, quality decision-making and durable solutions.



In the first half of 2008, traditional refugee-receiving countries in Western Europe recorded the lowest number of asylum applications in many years. At the same time, Southern Europe and the Nordic countries saw significant increases, including a sharp rise in the number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. Close to 63,000 individuals applied for international protection in Southern Europe in 2007, an increase of 63 per cent over 2006, with the largest numbers recorded in Greece and Italy. The Nordic countries registered more than 46,400 asylum-seekers, a 37 per cent increase from 2006. Sweden was the main destination of asylum-seekers in Europe in 2007 (36,400 claims).

In August 2008, the situation in the Georgian province of South Ossetia escalated into open hostilities. The conflict resulted in the displacement of more than 158,000 people, mostly within Georgia, adding to the 220,000 displaced by previous conflicts over the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The UN Country Team activated an inter-agency contingency plan, under which UNHCR leads the sectors of protection, shelter and non-food items and telecommunications. In the immediate aftermath of the hostilities, the High Commissioner visited Georgia and the Russian Federation, as well as South Ossetia, to secure humanitarian space for displaced civilians.

In Eastern Europe, the resettlement of refugees from the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine and Azerbaijan remains the only option because of the lack of local integration alternatives. At the same time,

UNHCR is working with governments to develop effective national asylum systems. In respect of resettlement from Turkey for non-European refugees, UNHCR has called for increased flexibility with regard to resettlement.

Attempts to reach Europe across the Mediterranean Sea continued in 2008. Arrivals by sea in Italy increased by 81 per cent compared to the same period in 2007. Both Greece and Malta faced challenges in upgrading their reception and asylum systems, further complicating access to effective protection for people of concern to UNHCR.

The number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South-Eastern Europe remains high. The protracted refugee situation in the region, particularly in Serbia, will receive particular attention in 2009.

## Strategic objectives

Close interaction with governments and other strategic partners is part of UNHCR's strategy to fulfil its mandate responsibility for refugee protection in Europe. The Office's role in the region is to promote and maintain international standards, assist governments in designing comprehensive strategies to address complex mixed migration flows, and find solutions for protracted refugee and internally displaced populations in Europe.

UNHCR's priorities in Europe for 2009 include: preserving asylum space in the broader migration context; ensuring

standards of protection; facilitating durable solutions; and working with partners to achieve its goals.

Particular focus will be given to developing strategies to address the situation of unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe, reinforcing cooperation with key partners in ensuring access to asylum, and enhancing resettlement capacity throughout the region.

## Preserving space for asylum

UNHCR offices on the southern and eastern borders of Europe are faced with the challenges emanating from mixed flows of asylum-seekers and migrants. UNHCR will help Governments maintain or establish protection-sensitive entry systems. It will also promote humanitarian solutions in areas such as interception and rescue at sea in the Mediterranean. UNHCR aims to ensure that protection safeguards are part of national policies so that people in need of international protection have access to safe territory and status determination procedures.

## Ensuring standards of protection

It is important that Europe remains a continent of asylum and protection for all who need it. This requires an asylum system that is fully compatible with international law and based on best practices. UNHCR continues to be concerned of the creation of systems based merely on minimum agreeable standards. In Western Europe, UNHCR's work with the European Union focuses on cooperating in the creation of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) that will guarantee fair decision making in line with international standards and best practices. The Office will continue to advocate for the formalization of its advisory role in the second phase of the CEAS's implementation.

In Eastern and Central Europe, capacity-building efforts are geared towards supporting or establishing national asylum procedures and administrative and institutional capacities. Key challenges include restrictive national asylum and immigration policies designed to curb the flow of irregular migrants, a tendency to regard asylum as part of migration and security control mechanisms, and frequent changes in asylum structures. The strengthening of partnerships and regional processes, agreements with governments on border monitoring, and the use of tools such as the 10-Point Plan of Action are all part of UNHCR's strategy to address these challenges.

The ExCom Conclusion of 2006 on identification, prevention and reduction of statelessness and protection of stateless people provides a clear platform and opportunity for UNHCR to enhance its activities in Europe. UNHCR will give priority to issues related to the status of individuals left stateless as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. This will be achieved through advocacy in cooperation with key partners such as the Council of Europe and promoting campaigns to enable stateless people to acquire citizenship.

Progress was made in 2008 on statelessness conventions: Finland acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, making it the 35th State Party to that Convention; Austria acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

## Facilitating durable solutions

In the Caucasus, seeking durable solutions for refugees and IDPs is a substantial part of UNHCR's work. Prior to the conflict, progress had been made in Georgia with the adoption by Parliament of the Action Plan for Internally Displaced Persons. This provides a framework for solutions, including local integration of the displaced



Spanish coastguards intercept a boat with migrants off the Canary Islands.

in areas other than their places of origin, while not infringing on their right to return. UNHCR will remain substantially engaged in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced populations while contributing a humanitarian focus to conflict resolution processes in the region.

With regard to comprehensive durable solutions strategies, UNHCR will promote the adoption of effective integration policies that guard the rights of people of concern. These policies should also help eliminate racial and other discrimination and xenophobia affecting refugees and other displaced populations in Europe. The Office will promote the strategic use of resettlement by identifying new resettlement countries, by processing emergency cases in the Emergency Transit Facility Centre in Romania, and supporting the European Union's resettlement schemes.

### Supporting UNHCR's work through partnerships

UNHCR has strengthened its partnerships with the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at External Borders (FRONTEX). A cooperation agreement with the agency covers regular consultations; the exchange of information, expertise and experience; and UNHCR inputs into training and other activities. Strategic partnerships have also been enhanced with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, IOM, civil society and regional institutions such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), the Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC), and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

## Challenges

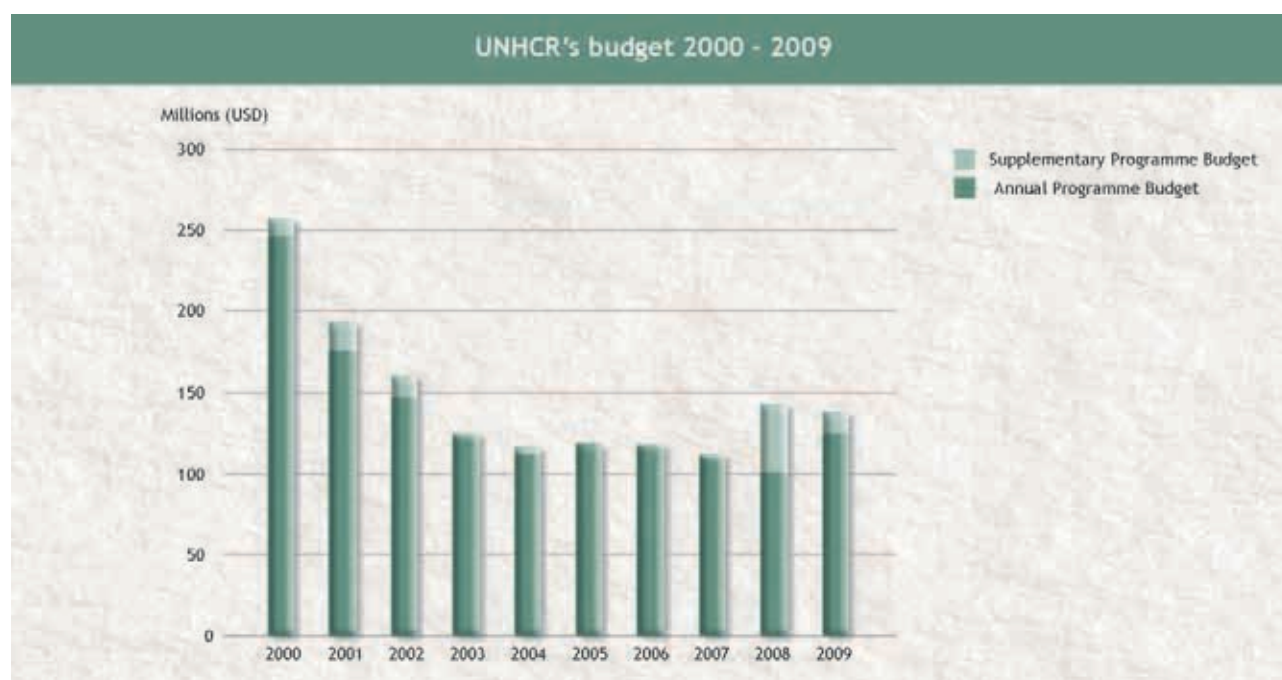
Key challenges in Europe include restrictive national asylum and immigration policies, frequent revisions of legislation and the politicization of the asylum debate. The complexities of bilateral cooperation on returns and readmissions in some parts of Europe are another challenge for UNHCR.

Eastern Europe is increasingly influenced by how asylum develops in Western and Central Europe. Within this context, it is imperative for UNHCR to ensure the use of the 10-Point Plan to safeguard protection space in an environment where States can place a high priority on security and border control.

Internally, the Bureau for Europe has participated in the Office-wide efforts at regionalization, particularly in Western and Central Europe. In 2009, the responsibilities of the Regional Office in Brussels, which presently covers the Benelux States, will be expanded to cover Austria, France, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

## Financial information

Budgets in Europe have decreased steadily since 2000 due to the easing of conflicts in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Exchange rate fluctuations and rising commodity prices pose challenges as UNHCR tries to ensure that the needs of people of concern in Europe are met. To ensure adequate assistance, UNHCR has increased fundraising in the field. These resources are used primarily for legal aid, the provision of documents to prevent statelessness, and assistance for sustainable return and reintegration.



Budget (USD)						
Countries	2008			2009		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Armenia	1,294,127	0	1,294,127	1,307,919	0	1,307,919
Azerbaijan	2,962,902	0	2,962,902	3,232,319	0	3,232,319
Belarus	1,007,851	0	1,007,851	921,280	0	921,280
Georgia	4,680,511	39,437,073	44,117,584	33,876,856	10,451,721	44,328,577
Republic of Moldova	606,496	0	606,496	698,176	0	698,176
Russian Federation	12,511,699	400,000	12,911,699	13,188,470	100,000	13,288,470
Ukraine	2,853,172	0	2,853,172	3,029,672	0	3,029,672
Regional activities <sup>1</sup>	50,000	0	50,000	100,000	0	100,000
<b>Subtotal Eastern Europe</b>	<b>25,966,758</b>	<b>39,837,073</b>	<b>65,803,831</b>	<b>56,354,692</b>	<b>10,551,721</b>	<b>66,906,413</b>
Albania	758,726	0	758,726	673,441	0	673,441
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5,615,204	0	5,615,204	5,688,204	0	5,688,204
Croatia	2,821,722	0	2,821,722	2,930,972	0	2,930,972
Serbia	19,054,388	0	19,054,388	20,897,195	0	20,897,195
Montenegro	2,312,508	0	2,312,508	2,390,475	0	2,390,475
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	2,685,404	0	2,685,404	2,757,133	0	2,757,133
<b>Subtotal South-Eastern Europe</b>	<b>33,247,952</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33,247,952</b>	<b>35,337,420</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>35,337,420</b>
Bulgaria	769,887	0	769,887	817,878	0	817,878
Cyprus	812,369	0	812,369	885,281	0	885,281
Czech Republic	363,526	0	363,526	455,414	0	455,414
Hungary	2,365,178	0	2,365,178	2,555,564	0	2,555,564
Poland	827,981	0	827,981	793,392	0	793,392
Romania	870,022	0	870,022	816,825	0	816,825
Slovakia	515,324	0	515,324	486,058	0	486,058
Slovenia	184,299	0	184,299	170,000	0	170,000
Turkey	5,535,009	1,844,230	7,379,239	6,680,536	1,952,784	8,633,320
Regional activities <sup>2</sup>	100,000	0	100,000	100,000	0	100,000
<b>Subtotal Central Europe and the Baltic States</b>	<b>12,343,595</b>	<b>1,844,230</b>	<b>14,187,825</b>	<b>13,760,948</b>	<b>1,952,784</b>	<b>15,713,732</b>
Austria	955,395	0	955,395	1,027,358	0	1,027,358
Belgium	3,553,431	0	3,553,431	5,377,870	0	5,377,870
France	2,603,133	0	2,603,133	2,741,533	0	2,741,533
Germany	2,383,557	0	2,383,557	2,079,598	0	2,079,598
Greece	1,112,951	0	1,112,951	1,065,579	0	1,065,579
Ireland	671,690	0	671,690	666,098	0	666,098
Italy	3,030,090	0	3,030,090	2,742,810	0	2,742,810
Malta	39,221	0	39,221	143,670	0	143,670
Portugal	45,000	0	45,000	85,653	0	85,653
Spain	929,701	0	929,701	947,402	0	947,402
Sweden	1,831,095	0	1,831,095	1,905,838	0	1,905,838
Switzerland	651,187	0	651,187	691,854	0	691,854
United Kingdom	1,644,736	0	1,644,736	1,421,307	0	1,421,307
<b>Subtotal Western Europe</b>	<b>19,451,187</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19,451,187</b>	<b>20,896,570</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20,896,570</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>91,009,492</b>	<b>41,681,303</b>	<b>132,690,795</b>	<b>126,349,630</b>	<b>12,504,505</b>	<b>138,854,135</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes activities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> Includes promotion of refugee law.

Note: Supplementary programme budgets exclude 7 per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.