# Eastern Europe

Armenia

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Georgia

Republic of Moldova

Russian Federation

Turkey

Ukraine

A new **UNHCR initiative** to help distribute monthly subsistence allowances enables asylum-seekers in the Republic of Moldova to use ATM debit cards.

## | OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- The Governments of Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have supported the principle of the local integration of refugees, but implementation has varied. In general, coordination on local integration among UNHCR, the authorities and NGOs has improved, and proposed funding from the European Union (EU) in 2012 helped give priority to this important durable solution. Employment remained a challenge, but language classes, vocational training, business grants and housing assistance have helped a number of refugees to find better jobs.

- Prolonged governmental transition continued to limit access to asylum procedures in Ukraine, where decision-making fell short of international standards. Meanwhile, UNHCR continued to provide legal and material assistance to people of concern, particularly those with specific needs, and sought solutions for persons in need of international protection.

- The 10-Point Plan of Action on mixed migration continued to guide programme design and implementation, providing a framework for targeted responses to issues of asylum and migration, in cooperation with national and regional partners. The Plan has acquired particular importance in view of the continuation of EU funding for regional programmes and local integration schemes in 2012-2013.

- With the integration of the Söderköping process into the EU Eastern Partnership in December 2011 and the establishment of a new Panel on Migration and Asylum, there is a renewed platform for strengthened regional collaboration in order to improve the delivery and quality of national asylum systems.

# EASTERN EUROPE

## | Working environment |

UNHCR has worked in a diverse range of situations in Eastern Europe involving asylum-seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and stateless people.

Asylum systems in the subregion have again been influenced by political changes and sensitivities, some countries refusing to consider asylum for persons of specific nationalities. The generally low recognition rates and the increasing use of complementary forms of protection in place of the 1951 Convention status were again of concern to UNHCR, which intervened as necessary to prevent *refoulement*.

The frequent reshuffling of government departments handling asylum, migration and border management has posed particular problems. Malfunctioning asylum systems have prompted irregular onward movements of people of concern – many of whom became victims of human trafficking – particularly towards countries of the EU, often with the help of human smugglers.

Throughout the subregion, UNHCR provided direct assistance grants to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees, ensuring their protection and helping them to meet their immediate needs pending decisions on their status or the provision of a sustainable durable solution.

Statelessness has remained an issue throughout the subregion. Precise numbers were still unknown, but could be as high as 120,000.

Large-scale internal displacement remained a challenge in Eastern Europe. Up to 1 million people were still displaced in the Caucasus region. UNHCR worked in most countries in the region to ensure that IDPs were protected and assisted in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. It also promoted durable solutions, including return and local integration where possible.



## | Achievements and impact |

The lack of sufficient registration capacity, problems encountered by people of concern in accessing territory, and low recognition rates were further indicators of weak asylum systems in parts of Eastern Europe. UNHCR pursued its effort to strengthen national asylum systems, attempting to ensure that legislation, as well as fair and transparent procedures, were available to those seeking refugee status and in need of protection.

While many countries have enacted new asylum legislation, or were about to do so, implementation practices frequently fell short of international standards. Asylum systems were particularly vulnerable at times of government reform, leading to vacuums in administrative structures and the provision of protection.

As a result, in a number of countries, UNHCR intervened more and more on behalf of individuals or groups to ensure their access to territory, procedures and appeal processes. UNHCR served as first contact for asylum-seekers and referred them to governmental status determination procedures—except in the case of some groups in Turkey, Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation where the procedures were undertaken directly by UNHCR. The Office's main aim was to identify and support individuals and help policy-makers and governments improve national asylum systems, using resettlement as a protection tool and a durable solution only when national mechanisms were exhausted.

Increasingly, UNHCR called on development actors to ensure that the needs of refugees, and in many cases IDPs, were integrated into national development frameworks.

## | Constraints |

Countries in the subregion all faced common challenges, with governments perceiving refugee and asylum issues as part of the broader migration agenda, giving such issue less priority than border security and migration management needs.

Although some positive developments were observed in legislative frameworks in Turkey and Ukraine, and in the reception of asylum-seekers and determination of their claims in the Russian Federation, asylum systems in the subregion remained fragile and vulnerable to political changes and sensitivities. Some countries refused to consider asylum applications from persons of specific nationalities. Limited access to territory and asylum procedures, instances of *refoulement*, low recognition rates and the increasing use of complementary forms of protection instead of the 1951 Convention status were other concerns.

Asylum systems that do not function properly contribute to situations whereby persons of concern move on irregularly, particularly in an attempt to reach the European Union, often with the help of human smugglers. A number of Eastern European countries prioritize control of irregular migration over asylum, which is often perceived as a lower priority. Indeed, some countries seem to consider a fully functioning asylum system an impediment to the implementation of their migration policies.

Many asylum-seekers and refugees in Eastern Europe remained dependent on UNHCR's financial support, especially in countries where they were not allowed to work, often spurring their onward movement in search of economic and social protection. Local integration schemes for recognized refugees have remained embryonic and received no priority in government planning. Moreover, xenophobia and racism made it difficult for refugees to integrate.

Durable solutions for the nearly 1 million IDPs could often not be implemented as the root causes of their displacement had not been dealt with. In some parts of the region, humanitarian space has narrowed and security concerns have limited UNHCR's scope of action.

## Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Georgia**, the **Russian Federation** and **Turkey** are presented in separate chapters.

In **Armenia**, UNHCR continued to monitor and implement a rights-based approach to improve standards in the treatment of refugees and promote their local integration. For those unable to meet their immediate needs, UNHCR provided targeted assistance geared to gaining self-reliance. The Office also encouraged community-based activities, with emphasis on building the capacity of refugee community associations.

The Armenian authorities received UNHCR's assistance to build a national asylum system. Through workshops, seminars and on-the-job training, UNHCR enhanced basic skills, disseminated expert knowledge and illustrated best practices in developing and managing asylum systems.



**Persons of concern to UNHCR
Eastern Europe**

Shelter interventions improved the living conditions of 50 extremely vulnerable naturalized former refugees.

In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR pursued dialogue and cooperation with the Government to strengthen asylum procedures and facilitate refugees' access to employment, basic rights and self-reliance. Some 1,670 people benefited directly from monthly subsistence allowances to alleviate the most urgent and basic household needs. The medical care project for refugees provided primary medical assistance to an average of 120 patients per month.

To promote their local integration and reduce their dependence on cash assistance, some 150 refugees received grants to help establish small businesses. Some 25 refugee and IDP women received targeted support to pursue handicraft and hairdressing skills. More than 250 refugees and IDPs were trained in computer technology and other professional skills to improve their employment opportunities.
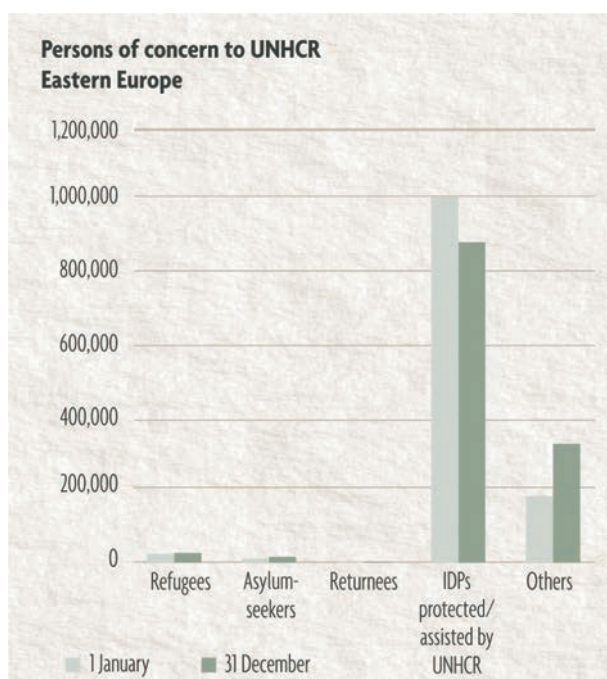
The work of the Regional Office in Kyiv, which covers **Belarus**, the **Republic of Moldova** and **Ukraine**, used the 10-Point Plan of Action as a strategic tool in responding to mixed migration movements. The work took on added urgency given the proximity of these countries to the EU, the substantial challenges raised by mixed migration movements through and to their territories, and the emigration of their citizens.

UNHCR's regional strategy has evolved in line with the following imperatives: (i) enhancing compliance with international standards, in particular through protection-sensitive approaches to border and migration management as well as the quality of refugee status determination (RSD); (ii) supporting the local integration of refugees and the resettlement of those for whom integration in the region is not an option; (iii) advocating for accession to the Statelessness Conventions, and better identification of, as well as support for, stateless people; and (iv) supporting persons of concern not assisted by governmental systems, while encouraging the authorities to take over this responsibility in the medium term.

In view of the global economic crisis, and a reduction in the level of attention paid by governments to refugee protection, UNHCR's support was of crucial importance in helping States to meet their commitments to international standards. Protection monitoring, including at borders, undertaken jointly by the authorities, UNHCR, IOM and NGOs, was an important mechanism to ensure access to territory and asylum procedures, as well as identify gaps in national systems needing to be addressed in order to provide protection to persons of concern.

## Financial information

Budgets for Eastern European countries have been largely stable over the last five years, with strong donor support for UNHCR's local integration and protection programmes in Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Major protection challenges still remained, however, calling for direct intervention by UNHCR to provide protection and solutions in the absence of national structures and procedures.

## Budget and expenditure in Eastern Europe | USD

| Country | | PILLAR 1 Refugee programme | PILLAR 2 Stateless programme | PILLAR 3 Reintegration projects | PILLAR 4 IDP projects | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Armenia** | Budget | 2,391,101 | 180,784 | 983,717 | 0 | **3,555,602** |
| | Expenditure | 1,040,889 | 114,059 | 248,068 | 0 | **1,403,016** |
| **Azerbaijan** | Budget | 4,792,535 | 253,233 | 0 | 1,078,853 | **6,124,621** |
| | Expenditure | 3,239,524 | 96,981 | 0 | 299,898 | **3,636,403** |
| **Georgia** | Budget | 2,798,288 | 1,587,558 | 0 | 13,955,217 | **18,341,063** |
| | Expenditure | 2,260,273 | 703,977 | 0 | 11,810,467 | **14,774,717** |
| **Russian Federation** | Budget | 8,567,841 | 1,220,242 | 1,281,808 | 13,675,359 | **24,745,250** |
| | Expenditure | 7,590,210 | 921,569 | 281,024 | 2,516,680 | **11,309,483** |
| **Turkey** | Budget | 20,197,926 | 249,392 | 0 | 0 | **20,447,318** |
| | Expenditure | 12,294,401 | 147,010 | 0 | 0 | **12,441,411** |
| **Ukraine Regional Office**[1] | Budget | 10,555,407 | 852,287 | 0 | 0 | **11,407,694** |
| | Expenditure | 6,667,347 | 448,880 | 0 | 0 | **7,116,227** |
| | **Total budget** | **49,303,098** | **4,343,496** | **2,265,525** | **28,709,429** | **84,621,548** |
| | **Total expenditure** | **33,092,644** | **2,432,476** | **529,092** | **14,627,045** | **50,681,257** |

[1] Includes activities in Belarus and the Republic of Moldova.

## Voluntary contributions to Eastern Europe | USD

| Earmarking / Donor | PILLAR 1 Refugee programme | PILLAR 3 Reintegration projects | PILLAR 4 IDP projects | All pillars | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **EASTERN EUROPE SUBREGION** | | | | | |
| European Union | 78,413 | | | | 78,413 |
| United States of America | | | | 8,950,000 | 8,950,000 |
| **Eastern Europe subtotal** | **78,413** | **0** | **0** | **8,950,000** | **9,028,413** |
| **ARMENIA** | | | | | |
| Brazil | 50,000 | | | | 50,000 |
| Russian Federation | | | | 83,333 | 83,333 |
| UN Trust Fund for Human Security | | 12,370 | | | 12,370 |
| **Armenia subtotal** | **50,000** | **12,370** | **0** | **83,333** | **145,704** |
| **AZERBAIJAN** | | | | | |
| Switzerland | | | | 268,817 | 268,817 |
| **Azerbaijan subtotal** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **268,817** | **268,817** |
| **GEORGIA** | | | | | |
| European Union | 209,202 | | 1,108,695 | | 1,317,898 |
| Switzerland | | | 537,634 | | 537,634 |
| *Deutsche Stiftung für UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe* | | | 333,333 | | 333,333 |
| **Georgia subtotal** | **209,202** | **0** | **1,979,663** | **0** | **2,188,865** |
| **RUSSIAN FEDERATION** | | | | | |
| European Union | | 91,863 | 774,562 | | 866,426 |
| Russian Federation | | | | 83,333 | 83,333 |
| Switzerland | | 10,753 | 204,301 | | 215,054 |
| UN Trust Fund for Human Security | | | 312,084 | | 312,084 |
| United States of America | | | | 250,000 | 250,000 |
| **Russian Federation subtotal** | **0** | **102,616** | **1,290,947** | **333,333** | **1,726,897** |

| Earmarking / Donor | PILLAR 1 Refugee programme | PILLAR 3 Reintegration projects | PILLAR 4 IDP projects | All pillars | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TURKEY** | | | | | |
| Andorra | | | | 10,000 | 10,000 |
| CERF | 1,692,740 | | | | 1,692,740 |
| Lebara Foundation | 141,443 | | | | 141,443 |
| Netherlands | 54,889 | | | | 54,889 |
| South Africa | | | | 122,761 | 122,761 |
| United States of America | 750,000 | | | 1,000,000 | 1,750,000 |
| **Turkey subtotal** | **2,639,071** | **0** | **0** | **1,132,761** | **3,771,833** |
| **UKRAINE REGIONAL OFFICE** | | | | | |
| European Union | 632,928 | | | | 632,928 |
| Russian Federation | | | | 83,333 | 83,333 |
| **Ukraine Regional Office subtotal** | **632,928** | **0** | **0** | **83,333** | **716,261** |
| **Total** | **3,609,614** | **114,986** | **3,270,610** | **10,851,578** | **17,846,789** |