

Central Europe and the Baltic States

Major developments

In 2005, there was an overall decline of 38 per cent in the number of asylum claims presented in the Central Europe and Baltic States region. In Europe as a whole, by contrast, there was only a 16 per cent decline. These statistics exclude Turkey, which is covered in a separate chapter.

The steady decline in Bulgaria continued with a 27 per cent drop, from 1,130 in 2004 to 820 in 2005. In Cyprus, the number of claims, which had risen to 9,860 in 2004, declined by 21 per cent to 7,770 in 2005. Nevertheless, at the end of the year Cyprus still had 9.3 new asylum claims per 1,000 inhabitants, the highest proportion of any European country. The only country in the region to see a significant increase in 2005 was Slovenia, where 1,600 people applied for asylum, 25 per cent more than in 2004.

Following a request by the High Commissioner, and as part of a move towards greater international burden-sharing, in July 2005 the Romanian Government agreed to admit some 439 Uzbek nationals to stay temporarily in Romania pending resettlement in third countries. In 2005, 75 Uzbek refugees departed Romania for resettlement in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. Further departures are scheduled to take place to Australia, Canada and the United States in 2006. The Government of Romania generously agreed to extend the stay of the remaining refugee population until 28 July 2006 to enable UNHCR to complete this operation.

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

The resettlement of Uzbek refugees bolstered UNHCR's ongoing efforts to promote burden sharing and resettlement in Europe. In Central Europe, the Czech Republic for the first time offered to accept refugees through this mechanism.

Challenges and concerns

In 2005, UNHCR was still very involved in strengthening asylum in Europe. Key areas in which gaps were apparent, particularly in countries in Central Europe and the Baltic States, included the right of access to national territory and asylum procedures; inadequate scope for people to present their claim (especially the lack of access to effective legal advice and confinement in detention or transit/border zones); and the quality of decision making, including the standards of interpretation and application of legal protection norms.

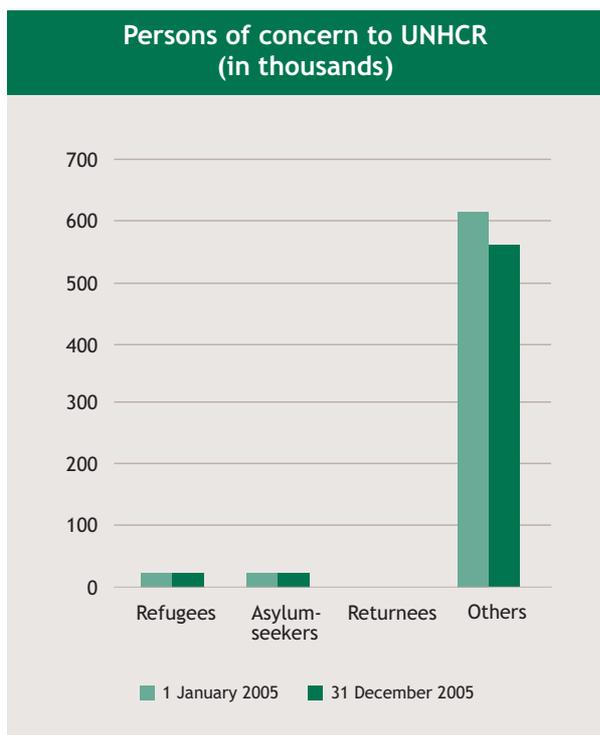
UNHCR continued to express its concern regarding the willingness and ability of the border European Union (EU) member States to cope not only with the pressures they currently face, but also with the potentially heightened pressures they could face in the future. In general, the problems centre on the responsibilities ascribed to these States under the Dublin Regulation, which places the burden of determining an asylum claim and providing a durable solution primarily on the State where the claimant entered the Union.

In 2005, in a number of the countries of the region the integration of refugees was still hampered by the lack of



a comprehensive integration strategy and the limited expertise within the institutions responsible for refugee integration. A major challenge remained integrating those who were given complementary forms of protection. This in turn sometimes led refugees to move on, in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

Despite a general decrease in the number of asylum applications in 2005, pressures remain in a few States in the region. These pressures contributed to overcrowded reception facilities, an increased use of detention for asylum-seekers and unclear criteria for the imposition of such detention measures, as well as limited awareness of problems linked with sexual and gender-based violence.



Progress towards solutions

The Office's strategy in Central Europe and the Baltic States draws on the following operational goals for Europe as a whole: asylum-seekers and people in need of international protection should have access to the territories of European States and to fair, efficient and effective asylum procedures; refugees should be treated in accordance with international protection standards so that effective durable solutions, including local integration, become a real possibility; countries developing new asylum systems should meet international standards of legislation and practice; and public opinion should become receptive to a refugee's need for protection and lasting solutions.

UNHCR continued to urge States to accept a broad, inclusive interpretation of the refugee definition, and to offer to assist them to address the complex challenges they faced, sharing lessons learned and best protection practices through training, consultations and other forms of dialogue.

Operations

With a view to improving coordination of regional protection programmes, UNHCR continued to group its presence in Western and Central Europe around regional representations. The Regional Representation in Budapest, covering Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, opened in 2005 and is now fully operational.

UNHCR carried out several monitoring missions to assess the level of access by asylum-seekers to the territory and refugee status determination (RSD) procedures. In addition, a pilot cross-border monitoring project revealed the magnitude of the denial of access to national territory and to RSD procedures, with foreigners sometimes kept in pre-detention holding facilities pending deportation, mainly within the framework of readmission agreements. In practice, detainees in pre-detention holding facilities, often located close to border entry points, have very limited access to legal counselling. The project underlined the need for systematic border monitoring to be put in place, including at international airports, in order to identify those in need of protection.

In Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, gender, age and diversity assessments were organized between September and November 2005. The assessment teams representing governments, UNHCR and NGOs, encountered several common problems throughout the

subregion, such as lack of access to legal aid and information, unsatisfactory conditions in reception centres and slender hopes of integration. UNHCR offices implemented empowerment and self-reliance activities in support of broader local integration initiatives. Refugees from Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia travelled to Bulgaria and Romania to observe refugee self-help programmes and meet with refugee associations. Similar exchanges are planned for 2006.

To improve awareness and understanding of international legal obligations that require that asylum-seekers be granted unimpeded access to national territory and asylum procedures, senior border guard officials were trained on the principle of *non-refoulement* and on how to use country of origin information.

During the transposition of various EU directives into national legislation, UNHCR stressed that national legislation in the new EU member States must accord with international standards and practice. The Office had earlier expressed strong concerns about some directives, notably the directive on asylum procedures and the so-called qualification directive. UNHCR noted that if these directives were transposed without further safeguards, it might result in breaches of international law.

Partnerships, public awareness and advocacy

UNHCR continued its efforts to mobilize public support for protection and integration policies. The Office launched public awareness campaigns and organized media events designed to help the public understand the plight of refugees and acknowledge the contribution they

Budget and expenditure (USD)

Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total
Bulgaria	1,050,829	0	1,050,829	1,028,427	0	1,028,427
Cyprus	757,301	0	757,301	628,509	0	628,509
Czech Republic	1,017,036	0	1,017,036	871,610	0	871,610
Hungary	2,203,125	0	2,203,125	2,047,049	0	2,047,049
Poland	856,285	0	856,285	804,093	0	804,093
Romania	1,957,643	0	1,957,643	1,935,448	0	1,935,448
Slovakia	774,012	0	774,012	713,090	0	713,090
Slovenia	606,661	0	606,661	512,927	0	512,927
Turkey	8,258,797	899,475	9,158,272	7,380,361	619,218	7,999,579
Regional projects ²	297,000	0	297,000	259,429	0	259,429
Total	17,778,689	899,475	18,678,164	16,180,943	619,218	16,800,161

¹ The supplementary programme figures apply to the Iraq Operation.

² Includes activities relating to the promotion of refugee law.

Note: The supplementary programme budget does not include a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

make to their host communities. UNHCR, together with an NGO partner in Hungary, developed public information materials. In Poland, UNHCR's website was expanded to reach out to the wider public. Major media events were organized for World Refugee Day, which contributed to furthering awareness and understanding of refugee issues. The advocacy strategy included regular meetings with decision makers, thematic workshops and round tables; the production and distribution of reference, training and public information materials; and close cooperation with the media to help to ensure a balanced presentation of refugee issues to the public.



Czech Republic: Children asylum-seekers in the playroom of Visny Lhoti reception centre for new arrivals in northern Moravia. UNHCR / L. Taylor

UNHCR took appropriate measures to ensure that gender policies, as well as issues concerning separated refugee and asylum-seeking children, were included on the agenda of protection meetings with governmental institutions, NGOs and other cooperating agencies. UNHCR issued numerous press reports to address specific situations.

In Central Europe and the Baltic States, many refugee integration projects are implemented by national NGOs that receive little government funding. As a result, they are often unable to meet their objectives. The lack of real integration prospects and the limited self-reliance opportunities for refugees and others in need of international protection are principally responsible for their move west. UNHCR continued to work with governments and NGOs to improve and implement national integration programmes, and to

promote the participation of refugees in the design and implementation of these programmes.

Funding

An increasing number of Central European States made donations to UNHCR's programmes in 2005. UNHCR offices continued to advocate and lobby governments, regional organizations, private individuals and corporations to help fund UNHCR operations worldwide. Worthy of particular mention is that most of the countries described in this chapter continued to provide rent-free premises to UNHCR or contributed to the cost of office rental. A private sector fundraising project was initiated in Romania.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget
Central Europe and the Baltic States	Sweden	302,572
	United States	2,350,000
	Sub-total	2,652,572
Romania	Ernst & Young SRL	3,684
	Sweden	756,430
	Sub-total	760,114
Turkey	European Commission	269,923
	Netherlands	238,917
	United States	340,000
	Sub-total	848,840
Regional activities		
	Russian Federation	250,000
Sub-total		250,000
Total		4,511,526

¹ For more information on the earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.