

Central Europe and the Baltic States

Recent developments

Asylum applications in Central Europe, the Baltic States and Cyprus in 2002 numbered 38,161 – 26 per cent fewer than in 2001. This downward trend can be attributed to several developments: fewer Afghans seeking asylum; new visa requirements in neighbouring countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina; and enhanced border controls. Decreases of more than 50 per cent were observed in Romania and Slovenia, while Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia received higher numbers of asylum-seekers. Transit movements continued to pose a particular challenge, but, in a positive development, in Poland, Lithuania and the Czech Republic, more asylum-seekers remained in the country during the processing of their asylum claims than was the case in 2001.

New asylum and/or aliens legislation either came into effect or was put before the parliaments in Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. In Slovenia, amendments to the Law on Temporary Refuge were introduced, creating the possibility of a durable solution

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



Challenges and concerns

Asylum-seekers still constitute only one component of a broader movement of various categories of migrants towards more affluent States in Western Europe. This makes it difficult to keep the asylum issue high on the political agendas of Central European countries, whose Governments are increasingly concerned about the criminal and security aspects of human smuggling and trafficking. All Central European States are getting ready to assume new responsibilities as EU Member States, ten of them as early as in 2004. Within this context, their main concern, which is shared by UNHCR, is to find acceptable responsibility-sharing formulas within an enlarged EU, in order not to be left with an unbearable burden in terms of the processing and reception of asylum-seekers.

for the remaining long-staying Bosnian refugees. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons entered into force in Hungary in February 2002.

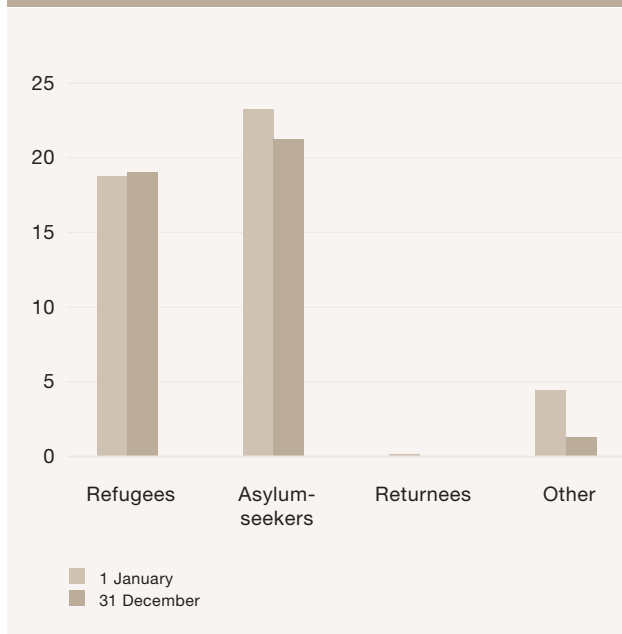
In December 2002, the European Council meeting in Copenhagen paved the way for the enlargement of the Union through the admission, by 2004, of ten new Member States, namely Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. This decision acknowledged the capacity of these States to live up to European Union standards in a wide range of policy areas, including migration management and asylum. In Bulgaria and Romania, which are slated for accession in 2007, existing capacity-building programmes will be continued and intensified.

For a description of developments and related UNHCR activities in **Turkey**, see the separate country chapter.

Access to the territory and to asylum procedures remains problematic in some countries, for want, *inter alia*, of effective monitoring and referral systems at land, sea and air borders. Reception facilities are not always adequate, as demonstrated by instances of sexual and gender-based violence and the continuing phenomenon of separated children “disappearing” from reception centres.

In most countries, the integration of recognised refugees is still left to hard-pressed non-governmental organisations with little or no financial support from government sources. This is a concern, since without real opportunities for self-reliance they will be unable to integrate properly (and will be motivated to try to move on, towards Western Europe). UNHCR is working on both the governmental and the non-governmental track, instigating the development or revision of national integration programmes, introducing a gender perspective in such programmes, and promoting refugee participation in their design and implementation.

Persons of concern to UNHCR
(in thousands)



Operations and progress towards solutions

Asylum systems development

Despite severe financial constraints, UNHCR achieved considerable progress in 2002 in pursuit of its three-pronged strategy to strengthen asylum systems through national initiatives, formal regional co-operation and informal intellectual cross-fertilisation. A small regional support unit, based in Budapest, has been overseeing a process of regional synergy in four key areas of common concern in most Central European countries, namely: the provision of country of origin information for decision-making on asylum claims; building the capacity of the judiciary to decide on appeals in asylum cases; providing legal advice to asylum-seekers; and acknowledging the specificity of refugees' needs in social and psycho-social work.

Under an agreement with the Vienna-based NGO ACCORD, centralised and standardised country of origin information services were provided to six countries in the region, with governments gradually assuming the cost of these services. The European country of origin information network (www.ecoi.net), an electronic databank set up in 2001, was upgraded and became a key reference for governments, NGOs, judges and lawyers. Fifteen refugee law clinics provided legal assistance to

asylum-seekers in nine countries, and benefited from coordination and capacity-building activities provided by UNHCR's regional partner. These activities included curriculum development; professor and student exchanges; and a moot court competition. A new programme allowing asylum judges to benefit from the experience of their Western European counterparts was initiated in 2002, with co-funding from the European Commission.

UNHCR's emphasis on the refugees' integration needs led to the launch of a region-wide project aimed at giving structured professional support to practitioners in the social counselling and welfare fields. The active participation of refugees in this project ensures that specific aspects of their experience, as well as their potential contributions, are an integral part of the skills development package. This project was instrumental in developing a network of social clinics within universities and professional institutes throughout the region.

UNHCR also fostered co-ordination at country level between the various institutions and line ministries working with asylum-seekers and refugees. New players and stakeholders were continuously drawn into these networks, including parliamentarians, ombudsmen and members of the donor community.

Under the Separated Children in Europe project, national action plans were drawn up in all countries to address priority needs of unaccompanied children and adolescents seeking asylum in Central Europe. The most compelling priority is to identify and register these minors, and to remove them from the grip of smugglers and traffickers. Hungary's decision to set up a specialised reception centre for these children paved the way for the development of similar initiatives in other countries. Gender and age-sensitive indicators are being introduced into all aspects of reception and integration programmes.

Partnerships, Public Awareness and Advocacy

UNHCR and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) commissioned independent consultants to review several years of NGO capacity-building in Central Europe and collect lessons learned for future co-operation. Amongst other findings released in early 2002, it was recommended



Romania: Afghan and Somali refugee children are integrated into the society. Here, girls are pictured at a scout meeting.
UNHCR / I. Bumbac

that training on legal aspects of refugee work, advocacy, information technology and country of origin information be continued. As part of UNHCR's follow-up to this review, it was decided to add an NGO liaison officer to the regional support team in Budapest. Partnership with IOM involved several programmes such as return counselling and assistance for unsuccessful asylum applicants and the Genocide and Forced Labour Compensation Programme for survivors of the Holocaust.

In the context of World Refugee Day, a variety of initiatives were undertaken throughout the region, many of which focused on refugee women and children. The Czech Republic, for instance, organised the broadcast on Radio Free Europe and other stations of programmes about refugee women – in addition to the major exhibition on *Flight and Exile in Art*, which was held in Prague Castle through the summer. The Polish Ombudsman and UNHCR wrote an open letter to the press outlining the main concerns of refugees in the country. In Slovenia, an exhibition was

arranged at the Ethnographic Museum. In most countries in the region, UNHCR supports, both conceptually and financially, awareness programmes in schools and/or for teachers. The positive contributions that refugees can make to their host societies were highlighted through various public events, in which refugee associations played an increasingly important part.

Funding

Finding alternative sources of funding for NGOs remains a major challenge. However, some partners should benefit from an ECRE project funded by the UK lottery. UNHCR will therefore pursue efforts to ensure that governments set aside funding for NGOs and accept them as viable and reliable partners. In 2002, UNHCR's global funding shortfall led to an over six per cent reduction of the final allocation of the approved budget for the operation in Central Europe and the Baltic States.

Voluntary Contributions – Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution
Czech Republic			
	Czech Republic	9,231	9,231
	Private Donors Czech Republic	185,416	185,416
Turkey			
	European Commission	650,036	678,508
	Japan	200,000	200,000
	United States of America	724,500	724,500
Central Europe and the Baltic States			
	Sweden	282,754	282,754
	United States of America	1,975,500	1,975,500
Total		4,027,437	4,055,909

¹ For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)

Country	Revised Budget	Expenditure
	Annual Programme Budget	
Baltic States	280,000	261,600
Bulgaria	1,037,626	906,148
Cyprus	615,651	530,910
Czech Republic	1,077,696	1,031,433
Hungary	1,788,602	1,616,601
Latvia	85,609	66,868
Poland	715,202	673,932
Romania	1,082,312	993,930
Slovak Republic	606,461	537,693
Slovenia	719,048	639,463
Turkey	5,773,483	5,244,491
Regional Projects ¹	412,046	285,345
Total	14,193,736	12,788,414

¹ Includes activities relating to promotion of refugee law / emergency preparedness.