

Central Europe and the Baltic States

Working environment

The Central European and Baltic States include 11 countries, eight of which are contiguous to the external border of the European Union (EU). This is an important working parameter for UNHCR, as these countries have become major entry points for asylum-seekers into the EU, hence requiring continuous monitoring.

The growing phenomenon of mixed migration movements towards the countries in Central Europe and the Baltic States has led to asylum-seekers often being treated as economic migrants by border authorities. Such an undifferentiated approach causes severe hardships for those in need of international protection.

UNHCR is working to improve the quality of reception conditions in the subregion. Although the European Union has established a legal framework which defines minimum standards for the reception of asylum-seekers among its member States, significant shortcomings persist in a number of countries. These include inadequate medical care for asylum-seekers with specific needs; problems of access to education for minors; the excessive use of detention in dealing with asylum-seekers; the lack of access to social welfare; inappropriate accommodations; and problems with tracing and family reunification.

Bulgaria

Czech Republic

Estonia

Hungary

Latvia

Lithuania

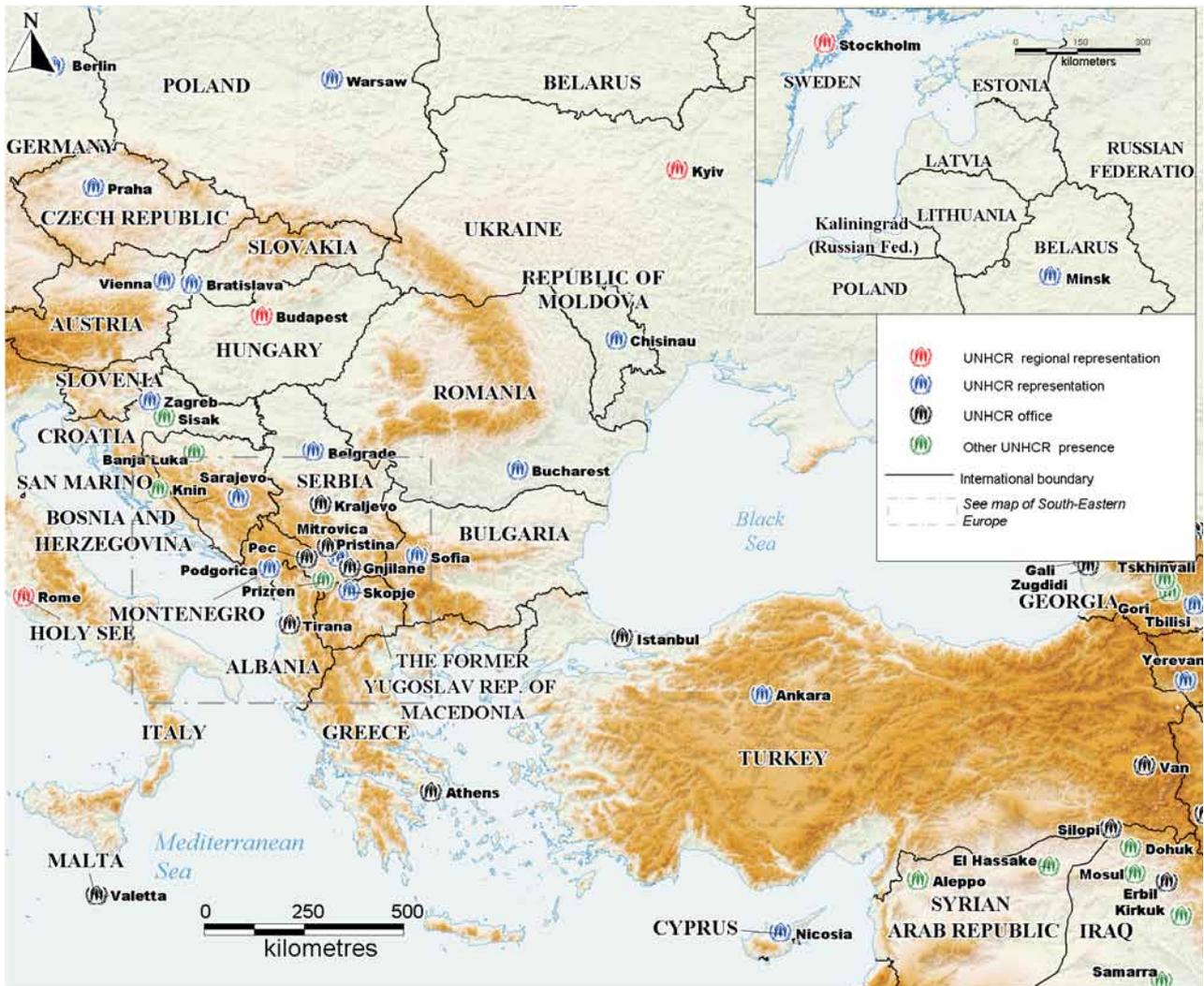
Poland

Romania

Slovak Republic

Slovenia

Turkey



Two UNHCR regional offices will continue to cover Central Europe and the Baltic States in 2009. The Regional Office in Budapest will oversee UNHCR's operations in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The Regional Office in Stockholm will oversee operations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, in addition to being responsible for the Nordic countries.

Strategy

UNHCR activities in the sub-region will be guided by the Joint Memorandum of Understanding on border monitoring signed between UNHCR, Slovakia and the local NGO Human Rights League. Discussions on joint border monitoring with the authorities and partners are at an early stage, particularly in countries such as Bulgaria and in the Baltic States.

As part of its efforts to promote a fair asylum environment in the region, UNHCR will implement the Quality Initiative Project on Refugee Status Determination. Initiated in eight countries in Central Europe in August 2008, the project will audit first-instance decisions on asylum applications and

make corrective recommendations, as required. It will be a strategic tool that helps governments to process asylum applications.

With regard to durable solutions in the region, local integration in many countries in Central Europe remains difficult. But there have also been positive developments in 2008. Some Governments have indicated they are willing to embark on resettlement programmes. The Office will continue to advocate for the establishment of resettlement programmes in the Baltic States.

UNHCR will gradually phase out its material and legal assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees as governments in the sub-region take over as primary providers of protection and assistance.

Constraints

UNHCR is confronted by many challenges in Central Europe and the Baltic States. The most recurrent ones relate to the absence of a common European asylum system; xenophobia; negative public attitudes towards asylum-seekers; and the excessive use of detention by law enforcement officers. Also among the challenges are



Refugee women in Slovenia attending a course in the Asylum Home in Ljubljana.

UNHCR / B. Szandelszky

restrictive interpretations of the 1951 Convention by the authorities who decide on asylum applications; the general lack of prospects for local integration; poor reception conditions for asylum-seekers in some countries; and the difficult situation of children and other persons with protection risks.

Operations

UNHCR's operation in **Turkey** is described in a separate chapter.

Ensuring access to territory, asylum systems and procedures

To ensure that asylum-seekers have unhindered access to the territory of the EU, the Office will continue to monitor the situation along its external borders. The aim is to encourage a consistent approach to common asylum issues—within the framework of the 10-Point Plan of Action on mixed migration—among countries that hold similar cross-border challenges.

Working jointly with governments and civil society, UNHCR will strive to ensure that States uphold the principle of *non-refoulement*. The activities envisaged include systematic monitoring of borders, with a UNHCR presence and regular visits to crossing points. The Office will also observe implementation of the Dublin II Regulation limiting the movement of asylum-seekers between EU countries.

In **Bulgaria**, for instance, cross-border activities will be initiated with neighbouring **Greece, Turkey** and **Romania**. UNHCR will provide appropriate training in international refugee law to judges, border guards and other officials involved in migration management.

The Office will advocate for increased access to asylum systems and procedures. As part of the newly established Quality Initiative in Central Europe, first-instance decisions on asylum applications will be audited to ascertain that they meet international standards. The quality of refugee status determination (RSD) in countries such as the **Czech Republic** remains of concern to UNHCR. The Office envisages closer monitoring and intervention, with a special focus on the usage of country of origin information during the asylum application process.

Both in Central Europe and the Baltic States, age, gender and diversity mainstreaming activities will be a vital source of information on how to enhance the care of those who are exposed to protection risks, such as women and children.

Improving reception conditions of asylum-seekers

The Office will regularly monitor areas where asylum-seekers are hosted to ensure that their reception conditions meet standards, with particular emphasis on basic human rights such as freedom of movement and documentation as well as access to health care, primary education and residence. UNHCR will develop a monitoring and evaluation tool to assess reception conditions for

asylum-seekers in the 27 member States of the EU, including the Central European and the Baltic States.

In **Poland**, the Office aims to address sexual and gender-based violence, discrimination against asylum-seekers of school age, and to improve the quality of integration programmes.

Continued search for durable solutions

While Central Europe and the Baltic States may continue to be seen as a transit zone rather than a destination by asylum-seekers, there is considerable momentum for the region to become a sustainable resettlement space. This was a conclusion of the regional conference on resettlement held in Romania in June 2008 which brought together a number of government, UN and NGO representatives in the region. In 2009, the Office will engage in dialogue with governments in the region with the aim of setting up national resettlement programmes both in Central Europe and the Baltic States.

At the country level, UNHCR monitors and supports the integration of refugees and other persons of concern; supports refugee participation and self-reliance; advocates for sustainable funding for local NGOs; and lobbies for the establishment and implementation of national programmes.

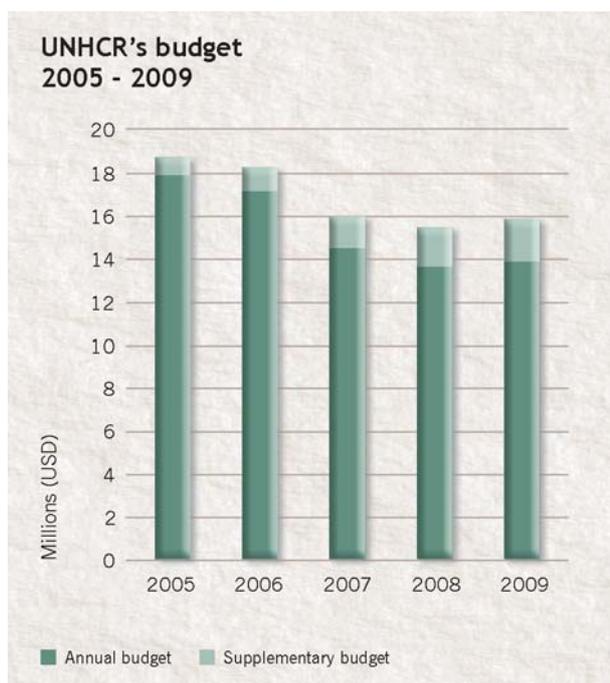
Enhancing partnership and collaboration

UNHCR is fully committed to strengthening its partnerships with all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to secure overall support for its mandate and its financial needs. To this end, the

Office will continue media campaigns and other public events to raise awareness of displacement issues.

Financial information

Despite exchange rate fluctuations, UNHCR's requirements over the last five years have remained relatively consistent. States have gradually assumed more of the costs of protection and fulfilling the material needs of refugees and asylum-seekers. The bulk of UNHCR expenditures are in Turkey, where the Office has a sizeable operation with a focus on RSD and resettlement.



Budget (USD)						
Countries	2008			2009		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
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 ¹	100,000	0	100,000	100,000	0	100,000
Total	12,343,595	1,844,230	14,187,825	13,760,948	1,952,784	15,713,732

¹ 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.