



Central Europe and the Baltic States

Operational highlights

- As the challenges of mixed migration become greater with the abolition of restrictions on movement within the European Union (EU), UNHCR has increased its capacity to monitor the EU borders and ensure that people with protection needs can access the territory. UNHCR's protection-sensitive migration and border policies, including the framework set out in the 10-Point Plan, were recognized in a new tripartite agreement on border monitoring initiated and signed by Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In addition, cooperation between UNHCR and the European Union External Border Agency, FRONTEX, was enhanced.
- The Office continued to move gradually away from material and legal assistance and towards advocacy in its efforts to strengthen asylum systems. The results can be seen in some instances where people in need of international protection were able to lodge asylum applications. The Office also gave priority to making sure that asylum-seekers had access to adequate reception conditions and refugee status determination (RSD) procedures.

Bulgaria

Czech Republic

Estonia

Hungary

Latvia

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Slovakia

Slovenia

Turkey



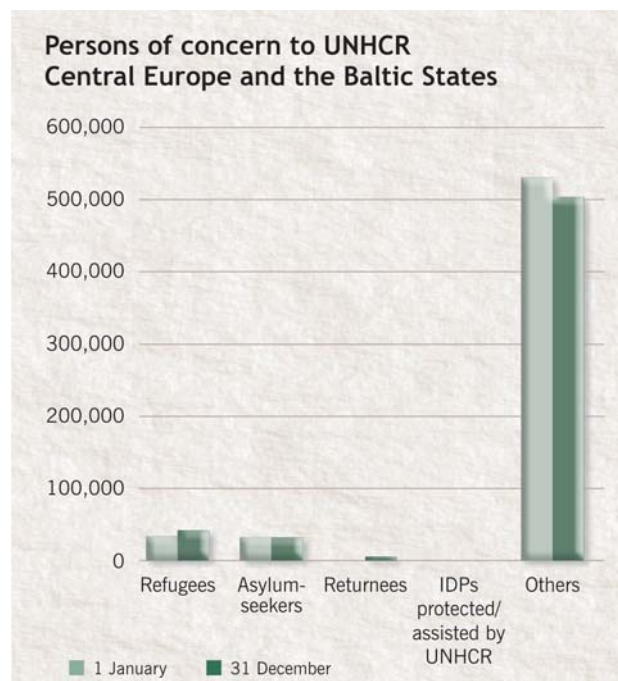
- The transposition of EU asylum-related directives into national law by the new member States continued in 2007. UNHCR played a supervisory role to ensure that the process met the needs of people requiring international protection. The EU is currently characterized by a collection of national asylum systems with different standards, many of them increasingly restrictive. Other problems include a lack of consistency in decision-making procedures and in standards of treatment for asylum-seekers.
- The search for durable solutions in the region was constrained by a trend towards xenophobia and a more restrictive interpretation of 1951 Refugee Convention.

increased from 11,200 in the beginning of January to more than 15,400 at the end of the year. The number of asylum-seekers in the Baltic States remained small, with 83 as of year end. In Central Europe, the contrast between 2006 and 2007 may be attributable to the expansion of the EU and the Schengen zone. These two

Working Environment

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU in January 2007 and the expansion of the Schengen zone to the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia in December 2007 were important milestones towards the creation of a common European asylum system.

The total number of asylum-seekers in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia





UNHCR/B. Szandelski

A refugee woman from Chechnya (right) is learning Polish at the Reception center in Linin, Poland.

elements, coupled with the fact that most of these countries have an external EU border, have transformed the region into a magnet for migrants from all over the world.

Achievements and impact

Access to territory and asylum procedures

UNHCR's joint border monitoring mechanisms in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia and the human rights training provided to border officials in these countries resulted in asylum-seekers having better access to these territories and to RSD procedures. In 2007 there were only a few reported instances of *refoulement*. UNHCR's improved relations with border officials led to greater access to legal counselling, assistance and representation for asylum-seekers in detention facilities.

Quality of asylum decisions

As a result of advocacy by UNHCR and civil society at large, the quality of asylum decisions continued to improve. In some countries, the refugee recognition rate rose notably.

The Asylum System Quality Assurance and Evaluation Mechanism Project (Quality Initiative), begun in the United Kingdom in 2003, is being replicated in eight countries in Central Europe. In 2007, the regional office in Budapest submitted a funding proposal to the European Refugee Fund for a project to monitor and evaluate the quality of asylum decisions.

Strengthening the protection environment

Pursuant to its supervisory function, the Office played an important role in providing input into parliamentary

debates during the ongoing transposition of EU directives into national laws.

UNHCR's input for the Green Paper on the Common European Asylum System was published to provide recommendations for the future of EU policy and law.

Constraints

One of the most serious constraints to UNHCR's activities in Central Europe has been the general confusion between asylum-seekers and economic migrants. This has given rise to increasingly negative attitudes towards refugees and asylum-seekers, making it difficult to find durable solutions for refugees in Europe.

Operations

Information on UNHCR's operations in **Turkey** is provided in a separate chapter.

UNHCR was involved in the airport procedures of the **Czech Republic**. The Office also undertook an assessment of integration opportunities for single women and people with specific needs. Through capacity-building projects, the recognition rate in the Czech Republic is now close to the European average of 17 per cent.

In **Bulgaria**, UNHCR worked to increase asylum-seeker's access to the territory, improve the quality of asylum decisions and to fill gaps in the implementation of the National Programme for Integration of Refugees. Border monitoring was strengthened through agreements with the National Service Border Police. As a result of these projects, over 500 asylum-seekers, including almost 50 children, were admitted to the territory and subsequently given access to asylum procedures. There were 14 instances of *refoulement* reported. Detention monitoring activities led to some 120 detained asylum-seekers being released.

The Office provided integration support by helping refugees to prepare documents for employment, job placement and accommodation. An age, gender and diversity project improved security at the reception centre in Sofia, reduced detention periods at the border, and streamlined registration procedures and the issuance of identification documents.

Throughout the **Baltic States**, the number of people in need of international protection continued to decrease. Only 2,800 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. At the same time, the issue of stateless people in the region requires continued attention.

The Baltic States joined the Schengen zone in December 2007. In order to assess the impact of this development, UNHCR organized joint border monitoring activities with the concerned governments to ensure that those seeking asylum have access to the territory and the asylum procedures.

The implementation of an agreement on Border Monitoring in **Hungary** in January 2007 was a major achievement. This agreement formalizes the roles, responsibilities and working methodologies of all stakeholders involved in the monitoring process. The agreement ensured that asylum-seekers have access to EU territory and asylum procedures.

Throughout the year, UNHCR worked to safeguard the quality of the asylum system by providing social and legal services, monitoring reception conditions, conducting RSD training and improving the quality of country of origin information. Strategic interventions and advocacy resulted in a commitment by the Government to provide matching funds to NGOs so that they could access EU funding sources, such as the European Refugee Fund.

A range of publications and news stories, visibility materials and events, and the launching of a Hungarian language website raised public awareness of refugee and asylum issues.

In **Poland**, the Office advised the Parliament during the transposition of relevant EU directives into Polish asylum law. Border monitoring activities played a vital role in promoting and ensuring access to the territory and asylum procedures. UNHCR enjoyed full access to land borders and airports. In 2007 there were no reports of asylum-seekers being prevented from entering the territory.

The Office successfully advocated to make it easier for asylum-seekers to join the labour market. The Polish Government extended integration programmes to new categories of people of concern and introduced new resettlement schemes.

In **Romania**, advocacy with government counterparts had positive results, not least in the establishment of an Evacuation Transit Centre (ETC). A tripartite agreement between the Government of Romania, the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR awaits finalization. The agreement stipulates that a maximum of 200 persons in need of international protection will be entitled, for a period of six months, to temporary residency status in the ETC pending their permanent resettlement in a third country.

In 2007, the Office continued to monitor border and reception conditions. Training sessions were conducted for lawyers, judges, prosecutors, public authorities, students and border officials.

Within the framework of the Cooperation Agreement signed with the Ministry of Education, 42 public schools introduced the pilot textbook, *Human Rights-Refugee Rights*, in 2007.

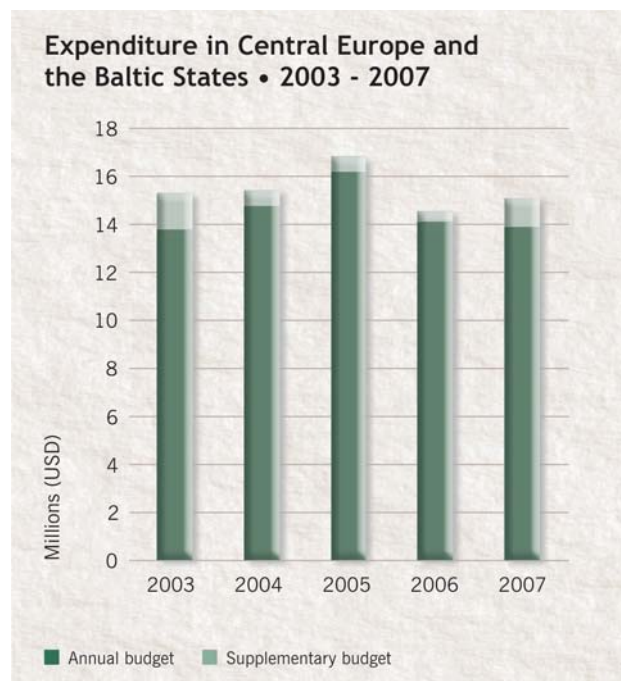
In **Slovakia**, a tripartite agreement on border monitoring was signed between the Office of the Aliens and Border Police of the Ministry of the Interior, UNHCR and the Human Rights League. This agreement created a framework for coordination to support access to the territory and asylum procedures.

As a result of UNHCR's advocacy, the Government amended the draft Aliens and Asylum acts. The Government agreed to provide matching funds for NGOs, allowing them to access EU funding. A range of publications and news stories, visibility materials and public events such as World Refugee Day ensured that refugee and asylum issues were portrayed positively.

In **Slovenia**, UNHCR continued to build the capacity of the relevant institutions and NGOs to ensure that the national asylum system meets international standards.

UNHCR's programmes focused on two main sectors: community services, and legal assistance and protection. The provision of social and legal services and the monitoring of reception conditions helped safeguard the quality of the asylum system. The Office collected information on stateless people in Slovenia which was published in a regional research paper.

Standard operating procedures and referral systems were established to deal with sexual and gender-based violence. World Refugee Day events and a set of roundtables on integration issues helped raise public awareness.



Financial information

States are bearing more of the costs of meeting the basic needs of people requiring international protection. Other stakeholders, including WFP and NGOs, made substantive financial contributions to assist UNHCR in addressing the protection needs of people of concern to the Office. UNHCR directed its funding towards

advocacy, public awareness and capacity-building activities.

The European Refugee Fund remained an important source of funding, particularly in helping new EU member states meet their asylum obligations. The countries in the region made financial contributions to UNHCR in 2007.

Budget and expenditure (USD)						
Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget ¹	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Bulgaria	961,258	0	961,258	958,057	0	958,057
Cyprus	792,399	0	792,399	787,069	0	787,069
Czech Republic	517,224	0	517,224	514,314	0	514,314
Hungary	2,140,745	0	2,140,745	2,090,838	0	2,090,838
Poland	983,700	0	983,700	961,286	0	961,286
Romania	1,111,081	0	1,111,081	1,068,618	0	1,068,618
Slovakia	549,360	0	549,360	511,897	0	511,897
Slovenia	208,106	0	208,106	191,523	0	191,523
Turkey	6,942,267	1,489,621	8,431,888	6,597,282	1,234,221	7,831,503
Regional activities ²	201,389	0	201,389	168,807	0	168,807
Total	14,407,528	1,489,621	15,897,149	13,849,691	1,234,221	15,083,912

¹ Excludes a seven per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

² Includes promotion of refugee law.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)			
Earmarking	Donor	Annual budget	Supplementary budget
Central Europe and the Baltic States	Sweden	291,121	0
	United States	1,900,000	0
	Sub-total	2,191,121	0
Regional activities	Russian Federation	59,754	0
	Sub-total	59,754	0
Cyprus	Cyprus	10,203	0
	Private donors in Cyprus	26,781	0
	Sub-total	36,985	0
Turkey	Australia	35,534	0
	European Commission	3,786	265,048
	Netherlands	255,007	0
	United Kingdom	160,154	0
	USA for UNHCR	46,500	0
Sub-total	500,981	265,048	
Total		2,788,840	265,048

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate related" (NAM) Reserve.