

A photograph of a room with orange curtains, a dark wooden cabinet, and a person sitting on a bed. The room appears to be a collective center for refugees. The title 'Eastern Europe' is overlaid on the image.

Eastern Europe

Armenia

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Georgia

Republic of Moldova

Russian Federation

Ukraine

Newly arrived refugees live in collective centres in Georgia

| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- Armenia, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova began implementing new asylum laws which were drafted with UNHCR's help. The new legislation provides for a complementary form of protection, in addition to that provided under the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- The adoption of stringent migration policies and practices in the subregion restricted refugees' access to the labour market. On the positive side, UNHCR's local-integration strategies in Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine helped the displaced obtain better access to housing, education, vocational training and national social-protection schemes.
- UNHCR worked with the authorities to prevent and reduce statelessness. The rise in the reported number of stateless persons can be seen as a positive indicator, as it reflects a willingness by the authorities to recognize the scope of the problem.
- Ongoing advocacy and integration strategies aimed at resolving the problems of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Eastern Europe. Several thousand achieved sustainable solutions, including in Georgia and in the Russian Federation, either through voluntary return, voluntary relocation or compensation.



Working environment

Some 13,500 people were registered as refugees in Eastern Europe at the end of 2009. The number of people seeking asylum in the region during the year fell to 3,500, a drop of 40 per cent from 2008. UNHCR remained concerned about low recognition rates and the increasing use of complementary forms of protection, instead of the granting of 1951 Convention status, and intervened in a number of incidents to prevent *refoulement*.

Although capacity-building efforts in recent years have progressed, asylum systems in the subregion remain fragile and vulnerable to political changes and sensitivities. Some countries refuse to consider asylum applications from specific nationalities. The frequent reorganization of government departments handling border management, migration and asylum poses a particular problem.

Where asylum systems do not function properly, people of concern tend to move on irregularly, particularly in an attempt to reach the European Union, often with the help of human smugglers.

The growing number of reception and short-term accommodation centres in the subregion has helped to improve conditions for asylum-seekers. Sometimes, however, the centres limit the freedom of movement of their inhabitants. Meant to be temporary, they could become long-term arrangements if not complemented by durable solutions for persons found to need international protection. UNHCR has provided technical expertise on the management of reception centres and supported the refurbishment of some of them in Azerbaijan and in Georgia.

Achievements and impact

UNHCR worked with national partners to ensure a protection-sensitive approach to border management, especially access to territory and asylum procedures for persons seeking protection. This included projects to train border officials and jointly monitor borders under the framework of UNHCR's 10-Point Plan of Action on refugee protection and mixed migration.

The Söderköping Process continued to provide a forum for discussions on border management, migration and asylum issues, between Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and various EU Member States. Offering the opportunity to share experiences and best practices, it has contributed to protection in the sub-region.

Local integration continued to be a challenge. Governments remained wary of providing access to social protection systems and language and vocational training.



Nonetheless, more than 500 refugees were granted citizenship in 2009, in Belarus, Georgia, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Encouraging developments were noted with respect to the prevention and resolution of statelessness, although only Armenia and Azerbaijan are parties to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions. Studies were completed in Belarus and the Republic of Moldova analysing national legislation in relation to the Conventions' provisions. Nearly 22,000 stateless people residing in the Russian Federation obtained residence permits or permission for temporary stay. A joint UNHCR-UNICEF project in Georgia helped more than 4,500 people to secure documentation and prove their citizenship, while Armenia made a commitment to deal with the issue of unregistered births.

Addressing internal displacement remained a priority. UNHCR helped Azerbaijan provide better housing and economic opportunities for the internally displaced. In Georgia, most of those who were displaced in 2008 found a durable solution, and the Government launched a three-year plan to

provide opportunities for integration to the 240,000 people displaced by earlier conflicts. The Russian Federation made considerable efforts to enable the return of IDPs to Chechnya.

| Constraints |

Securing asylum space is a long-term process which requires not only expertise but also sustained effort and political will. The current environment in Eastern Europe remains heavily influenced by sub-regional disputes, the economic crisis and the European Union's emphasis on controlling irregular migration. Refugees face considerable barriers to integration. The global economic downturn had a disproportionately negative impact on asylum-seekers and refugees, as their incomes often depend on the informal sector.

Xenophobia remained a problem. UNHCR documented physical assaults and abuse directed towards persons of concern. Some implementing partners raising awareness of this issue faced intimidation, particularly in Ukraine.

| Operations |

UNHCR's operations in **Georgia** and the **Russian Federation** are described in separate chapters.

In **Armenia**, UNHCR provided basic health care and social support to more than 5,300 people of concern and continued to advocate for the Government to assume these responsibilities. UNHCR rehabilitated 46 apartments for vulnerable Iraqi refugees and, as part of joint project with other UN agencies, constructed a school where refugee children will be enrolled. The Office also helped refurbish the Refugee Reception Centre and develop new registration software. Furthermore, it held national consultations with government and civil-society counterparts on ways to address protection gaps affecting refugees and IDPs, including in local integration.

In **Azerbaijan**, which hosts more than 2,300 refugees and some 580,000 IDPs, a verification exercise showed that the number of refugees had dropped by more than 500 (about 20 per cent) since 2008. Around 1,000 refugees have left the country in the last two years. UNHCR provided refugees with temporary protection and offered some material assistance to the most vulnerable. Eleven refugee students benefitted from DAFI scholarships. IDPs were also given non-food items. Both refugees and IDPs benefited from training on sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response strategies. The Office also found resettlement opportunities for 35 refugees and assisted another 14 to return home voluntarily.

UNHCR trained government officials in asylum procedures in order to improve refugee status determination (RSD). Legal aid was provided to more than 6,500 IDPs and 800 refugees.

UNHCR's operations in **Belarus** concentrated on supporting a functioning asylum system and offering

integration opportunities to beneficiaries of international protection. Medical assistance and legal aid were provided to people of concern. Some 40 per cent of refugees benefited from integration activities. The system to identify people of concern at border crossings and refer them to migration authorities improved in all regions. UNHCR-funded lawyers made several visits to detention centres and counselled 120 detainees, after which four people applied for refugee status and 55 were referred to IOM's return programme.

UNHCR's operation in Belarus will be strengthened by a country agreement initialled in 2009 that is expected to be signed in 2010.

In the Republic of **Moldova**, the Government began to implement a new law on asylum which is largely in compliance with international standards. UNHCR provided legal aid and health care to people of concern. The most vulnerable were provided with shelter support and social assistance. A National Steering Committee was established to address issues related to local integration. Activities such as language courses, social counselling and vocational training were initiated.

Some 2,000 persons are registered as stateless in the Republic of Moldova. UNHCR lobbied for the country's accession to the Conventions on Statelessness. An independent report on statelessness in the country was finalized by a UNHCR-commissioned legal expert and will provide the basis for further discussions.

In **Ukraine**, there has been no central authority to adjudicate asylum claims and issue identity documents to asylum-seekers since July 2009, and there was no progress in drafting asylum legislation. This resulted in a backlog of asylum applications from some 600 people, increasing their risk of *refoulement*. Under the framework of the 10-Point Plan of Action, UNHCR and its NGO partners conducted several border-monitoring missions in order to promote protection-sensitive border-control measures. These missions offered the opportunity to discuss access to territory and asylum procedures.

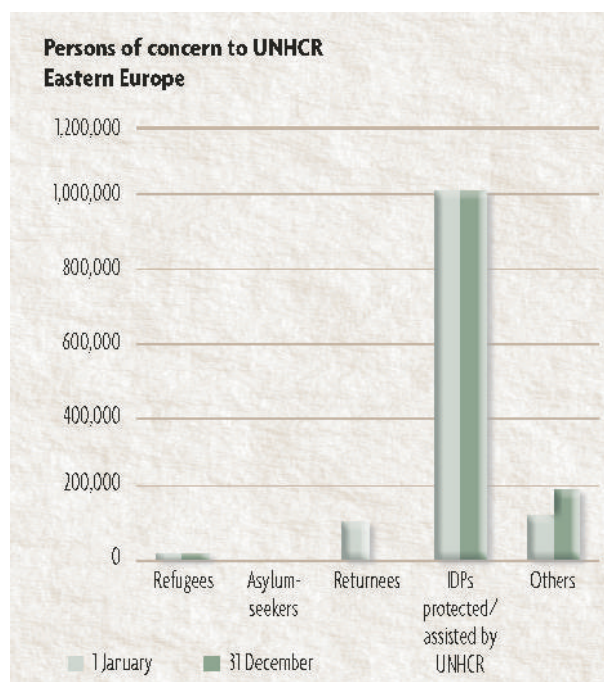
UNHCR provided legal aid to some 3,500 people, allocated a monthly subsistence allowance to 325 persons and offered social and psychological counselling to 2,000 individuals. Approximately 1,000 persons received basic medical aid funded by UNHCR.

Within the framework of the Local Integration project, a Ukraine National Steering Committee, made up of central and regional government officials, UN agencies, NGOs and refugees was established to deal with issues pertaining to local integration. A similar Regional Steering Committee, composed of stakeholders from Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, was established in Odessa.

Three higher education institutions began language-training sessions for 80 refugee and asylum-seeker students. Efforts were also made to help refugee children to enrol in secondary schools.

Financial information

UNHCR's budget for Eastern Europe has been relatively stable since 2005, with the exception of a large increase in Georgia in the aftermath of the August 2008 conflict. In 2009, Georgia was a pilot country for UNHCR's global needs assessment, which highlighted further needs, particularly for shelter activities. The 2009 budget also saw some growth with restricted contributions for special activities. These included strengthening the capacity of government entities, supporting responses to sexual and gender-based violence, providing accommodation for the displaced and supporting local integration.



Budget and expenditure in Eastern Europe (USD)

Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budgets	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Armenia	1,821,214	0	1,821,214	1,728,256	0	1,728,256
Azerbaijan	4,186,049	0	4,186,049	4,163,712	0	4,163,712
Belarus	1,718,191	0	1,718,191	1,445,622	0	1,445,622
Georgia	34,346,971	28,040,248	62,387,219	16,650,810	17,698,822	34,349,632
Republic of Moldova	1,497,631	29,449	1,527,080	1,166,952	29,449	1,196,401
Russian Federation	12,722,492	124,127	12,846,619	11,296,188	124,127	11,420,315
Ukraine	4,399,445	0	4,399,445	3,449,050	0	3,449,050
Regional activities ¹	836,263	0	836,263	543,060	0	543,060
Total	61,528,256	28,193,824	89,722,080	40,443,649	17,852,398	58,296,047

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

¹ Includes activities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

Voluntary contributions to Eastern Europe (USD)				
Earmarking	Donor	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Eastern Europe subregion	European Commission	633,400		633,400
	Sweden	1,170,351		1,170,351
	United States of America	4,435,500		4,435,500
Eastern Europe subtotal		6,239,251		6,239,251
Armenia	Council of Europe Development Bank	3,080		3,080
	UN Trust Funds for Human Security	629,269		629,269
Armenia subtotal		632,349		632,349
Azerbaijan	European Commission	923,665		923,665
	United States of America	336,580		336,580
Azerbaijan subtotal		1,260,245		1,260,245
Belarus	European Commission	616,425		616,425
	United States of America	34,056		34,056
Belarus subtotal		650,481		650,481
Georgia	Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)		935,000	935,000
	European Commission	5,820,136	6,300,350	12,120,486
	Finland		210,090	210,090
	HQ Online Donations (Switzerland)		59	59
	Japan	309,917		309,917
	Japan Association for UNHCR		1,656	1,656
	Private donors in Sweden		2,395	2,395
	Romania	70,323	392,405	462,729
	Statoil Azerbaijan	65,000		65,000
	Switzerland	261,097	403,854	664,951
	The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ (Japan)		11,282	11,282
	UNIQLO Co., Ltd (Japan)		15,292	15,292
	United States of America	8,409,419	8,387,146	16,796,565
Georgia subtotal		14,935,893	16,659,529	31,595,422
Republic of Moldova	European Commission	727,598		727,598
	United States of America	18,595		18,595
Republic of Moldova subtotal		746,193		746,193
Russian Federation	European Commission	2,125,026		2,125,026
	Switzerland	885,978		885,978
	UN Trust Funds for Human Security	350,000		350,000
	United States of America	1,000,000		1,000,000
Russian Federation subtotal		4,361,004		4,361,004
Ukraine	European Commission	472,322		472,322
	Hungary	6,588		6,588
	Sweden	92,119		92,119
	United States of America	112,193		112,193
Ukraine subtotal		683,222		683,222
Total		29,508,637	16,659,529	46,168,167

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