



# Central Europe and Baltic States

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

Asylum-seeker family arrival at a refugee centre  
in Debrecen, Hungary



## | OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- Enhanced border monitoring through the implementation of tripartite agreements between the Office, States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has resulted in better access to territory in Central Europe for asylum-seekers.
- The launch of a quality assurance project on refugee status determination (RSD) in eight countries in Central Europe in September 2008 has paved the way for the establishment of more fair and efficient asylum systems in the region.
- The Office has redoubled its efforts to promote resettlement as a protection tool. In this respect, a recent innovation in Europe was the establishment of an Emergency Transit Centre in Romania. The centre has provided a temporary safe location for refugees who are at risk or cannot remain in their host country while their resettlement is finalized.



# Central Europe and the Baltic States



## Working environment

As result of the ongoing global financial crisis, a number of States indicated they did not have the resources to take on new asylum-related activities, such as the improvement of reception conditions.

Mounting hostility and negative public attitudes towards asylum-seekers remained common in Central Europe and the Baltic States. This trend, coupled with a restrictive interpretation of the 1951 Refugee Convention by legislatures in some States, posed serious challenges to UNHCR's efforts to preserve protection space in the subregion.

Overall, the number of asylum applications in Central Europe and the Baltic States decreased in 2008 in comparison to 2007. The only exception is Romania, where the number of applications surged by some 70 per cent over the same period. The increase might be attributable to the border with Ukraine becoming a major migration route.

## Achievements and impact

The Office's main goals in Central Europe and the Baltic States included:

- Access to territory and RSD procedures.
- Advocacy for better reception conditions in line with international standards.

- Promotion of durable solutions for refugees and stateless persons.
- Advocacy for fair and efficient asylum procedures.
- Promotion of external relations and partnership.

Access to territory was significantly enhanced by the signing of new memorandums of understanding on border monitoring in Romania and Slovenia. The border-monitoring project focuses on gathering information on the protection situation affecting asylum-seekers so that trends and patterns can be tracked and interventions designed to address specific problems.

With regard to improving reception conditions, NGOs provided a range of social and legal services, including the monitoring of reception standards, through regular visits to reception facilities.

The Office formally launched the Asylum System Quality Assurance and Evaluation Mechanism, also known as Quality Initiative project, on 1 September 2008. The project covers Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Based on UNHCR's mandate responsibilities, the project will play a key role in the development of fair and efficient asylum procedures.

Prospects for durable solutions in Central Europe and the Baltic States remain a challenge. Meanwhile, States in the region have shown increasing interest in establishing national resettlement programmes.

Through a variety of public information activities, the Office has worked to inform public opinion about the international protection needs of people of concern and promote resource mobilization.

## | Constraints |

While UNHCR continued to advocate that Europe remain a continent of asylum, a number of States have security concerns about asylum-seekers. In Bulgaria, cases of *refoulement* were observed in 2008. The detention of asylum-seekers, including those with specific needs such as pregnant women and children, has been reported. In the Czech Republic, an increase in the detention of those applying for international protection is of concern to the Office.

Reception conditions for asylum-seekers vary considerably from one country to another. Inadequate medical care for asylum-seekers, limited access for minors to education and social welfare, lack of appropriate accommodation facilities, problems relating to maintaining and respecting family unity, tracing and family reunification are priorities which need to be addressed.

## | Operations |

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

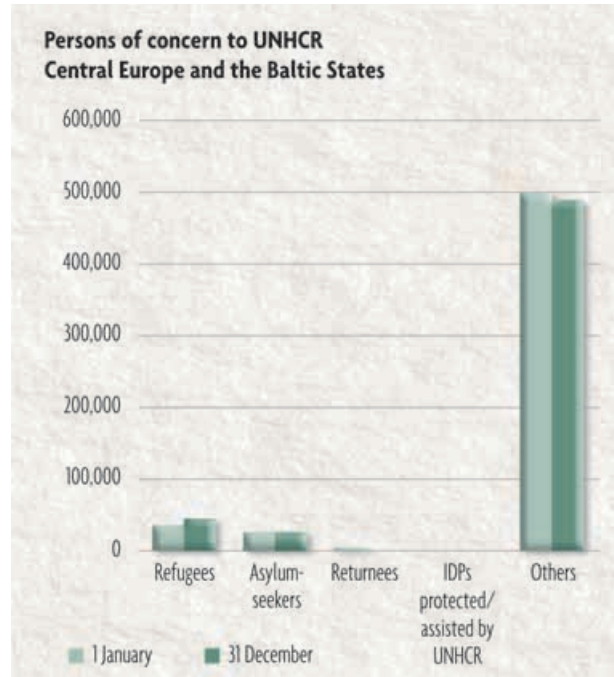
In the **Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)** the number of refugees and asylum-seekers remained small. The Office is involved in advocacy aimed at finding a solution to the situation of stateless people. However, the year ended without a clear indication that these States would consider adhering to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions.

In **Bulgaria**, some 6,200 individuals were in need of international protection. Notwithstanding the absence of a formal tripartite agreement on border monitoring, UNHCR focused its activities on access to territory. Monitoring was undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis along the borders with Greece, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. In partnership with the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Office also undertook local integration activities, community services and special projects for women and children.

Some 3,560 people in the **Czech Republic** were in need of international protection. Though the number of people seeking asylum declined by 12 per cent compared to 2007, the overall recognition rate, including subsidiary protection, increased from 17 per cent in 2007 to nearly 22 per cent in 2008. As result of a resettlement pilot programme adopted by the Government in June 2008, a group of 39 refugees originating from Myanmar was accepted for resettlement.

In **Hungary**, the implementation of the border monitoring agreement ensured better access for asylum-seekers to the territory and to asylum procedures. The number of asylum applications registered at the international airport in Budapest increased to 108 in 2008 (from 47 in 2007). At the end of 2008, there were some 11,160 people of concern to the Office in the country.

With the formal launch of the Quality Initiative project, the monitoring of the RSD that started in the second half of 2008 has become more systematic. The establishment of a Quality Assurance Unit within the Hungarian refugee



authority should allow UNHCR to hand over responsibility for all asylum-related issues. The project has already had a positive impact on the protection of asylum-seekers. The Government of Hungary has also initiated a resettlement programme.

In **Poland**, a border monitoring project was implemented with the assistance of a local NGO, and in cooperation with the Polish Border Guard. The NGO enjoyed full access to both land and air entry points. It organized several training sessions with a strong emphasis on the protection needs of vulnerable groups. These included separated children and victims of trauma, sexual and gender-based violence and human trafficking. There was no reported case of denial of access to the territory, which held some 18,500 individuals in need of international protection.

The Office assisted in organizing a conference for national and regional asylum law judges. Participants and other stakeholders agreed that the quality of court decisions on asylum cases had improved as a result of the Quality Initiative project.

In **Romania**, the Office and its partners provided legal services and monitored the condition of asylum-seekers at border and reception centres. A limited number of people of concern benefited from legal representation in the courts. Some 2,200 individuals were in need of international protection in the country. The Office's main operational achievement was the signing of the tripartite agreement between UNHCR, the Government of Romania and IOM to create the Emergency Transit Centre (ETC) in May 2008. The Centre represents an important protection mechanism that could be replicated in other countries in the Europe.

After the **Slovak Republic** became a member of the Schengen zone in December 2007, the number of people seeking asylum in the country decreased considerably. In 2008, the total number of applicants decreased by 66 per cent, as compared to the previous year. The total number of people of concern to the Office in the country stood at some 1,300 at the end of 2008. The Government assumed primary responsibility for the material assistance of all refugees and asylum-seekers. For instance, it provided the required matching funds to NGO projects funded by the European

Refugee Fund. This allowed UNHCR to move towards phasing out material assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers.

In **Slovenia**, the decline in new asylum applications continued, with the number of new asylum applications in 2008 declining by 44 per cent from the year before. The total number of people of concern to UNHCR stood at some 4,4400 at the end of 2008. One of the Office's major achievements was the signing of a tripartite agreement on border-monitoring, which began to be implemented towards the end of 2008. The systematic provision of social and legal services and the monitoring of conditions at reception facilities have had a positive effect on the situation of asylum-seekers in Slovenia.

## Financial information

Over the past few years the Central European countries and the Baltic States have gradually assumed responsibility for the costs of managing asylum issues, including the material assistance needs of refugees and asylum-seekers. This has allowed the Office to allocate its limited resources to activities related to its supervisory role under the 1951 Convention.

### Budget and expenditure in Central Europe and the Baltic States (USD)

Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Bulgaria	897,312	0	897,312	893,119	0	893,119
Cyprus	917,933	0	917,933	861,661	0	861,661
Czech Republic	459,026	0	459,026	427,085	0	427,085
Hungary	2,625,628	0	2,625,628	2,604,961	0	2,604,961
Poland	1,004,979	0	1,004,979	872,660	0	872,660
Romania	1,065,758	0	1,065,758	953,972	0	953,972
Slovakia	541,824	0	541,824	443,303	0	443,303
Slovenia	184,299	0	184,299	97,894	0	97,894
Turkey	6,416,072	2,244,230	8,660,302	6,275,213	2,104,786	8,379,999
Regional activities <sup>1</sup>	87,636	0	87,636	76,522	0	76,522
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,200,467</b>	<b>2,244,230</b>	<b>16,444,697</b>	<b>13,506,392</b>	<b>2,104,786</b>	<b>15,611,177</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes promotion of refugee law.

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

### Voluntary contributions to Central Europe and the Baltic States (USD)

Country	Donor	Annual Budget	Supplementary Budget	Total
Central Europe and the Baltic States subregion	Sweden	308,166		308,166
	United States of America	1,908,631		1,908,631
<b>Central Europe and the Baltic States Subtotal</b>		<b>2,216,797</b>		<b>2,216,797</b>
Cyprus	Cyprus	9,351		9,351
	Private donors in Cyprus	30,852		30,852
<b>Cyprus Subtotal</b>		<b>40,203</b>		<b>40,203</b>
Hungary	European Commission	185,225		185,225
	<b>Hungary Subtotal</b>		<b>185,225</b>	
Turkey	Czech Republic		153,172	153,172
	European Commission		706,109	706,109
	United Kingdom	146,648		146,648
<b>Turkey Subtotal</b>		<b>146,648</b>	<b>859,281</b>	<b>1,005,929</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,588,874</b>	<b>859,281</b>	<b>3,448,155</b>

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.