

Sudanese refugees at the Evacuation Transit Centre in Romania, which provides temporary shelter to refugees who are in need of immediate evacuation.

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



Central Europe

| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- UNHCR worked with national authorities to identify gaps in national asylum procedures and implement measures to address them.
- Tripartite monitoring agreements allowed the Office and its partners to work with border guards to ensure asylum-seekers had access to appropriate procedures, preventing *refoulement* in some cases.
- The Emergency Transit Centre in Romania, operated by UNHCR in cooperation with national authorities and IOM, and a similar but smaller facility in the Slovak Republic, facilitated the resettlement of refugees in need of this durable solution.
- The Office developed tools to evaluate and monitor refugee integration and reception conditions.
- The ability of national authorities to help victims of sexual and gender-based violence was improved by means of standard operating procedures developed under UNHCR's guidance.
- The Office continued to conduct refugee status determination (RSD) in Turkey, where, with few possibilities for durable solutions at the local level, the focus was on resettlement. Some 6,000 refugees were resettled from Turkey in 2009.



Working environment

High unemployment in the wake of the global economic downturn made it difficult for refugees to integrate. UNHCR faced many protection challenges, but collaborative relations with asylum authorities and strategic partnerships with civil society helped the Office to address these challenges.

Systematic monitoring and participatory assessments in all countries revealed various protection gaps and risks. Some of these arose from strict border-management regimes, primarily designed to protect the European Union (EU) and Schengen areas from irregular migration, while others were the result of restrictive asylum laws and practices. Reception conditions for asylum-seekers in Central European and Baltic States did not always meet EU standards. Possibilities for the integration of refugees were limited by the lack of coherent policies and structures, the absence of governmental funding and negative public attitudes towards migrants in general. Many States in the region had not acceded to the relevant conventions on statelessness.

In 2009, UNHCR received some 8,000 asylum applications in Turkey, a decrease by 40 per cent compared to 2008. In Cyprus the number of asylum applications fell by 18 per cent, from roughly 3,900 in 2008 to 3,200 in 2009. The Baltic States received asylum applications from only 300 persons during the year.

In the rest of Central Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia), the number of asylum applications rose by some 27 per cent from the previous year, with a total of 19,200 applications.

While the number of people recognized as refugees fell in comparison to the previous year, the number receiving complementary forms of protection increased slightly. Altogether, more than 3,800 persons received international protection in these countries.

Achievements and impact

Improving access to territory

UNHCR enhanced its cooperation with Central European immigration and border authorities as well as implementing partners in the monitoring of land borders and airports, contributing to a protection-sensitive approach to border management. The Office also provided training on the identification of asylum-seekers and the provision of assistance to them. Border-monitoring agreements were implemented in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, and a similar agreement was being pursued with Lithuania.

Ensuring dignified reception conditions

With their budgets affected by the economic crisis, the Baltic States took no steps towards improving reception standards. Nonetheless, UNHCR worked closely with governments and other partners to address practical issues affecting asylum-seekers in reception or detention facilities. A tool to monitor reception conditions in all EU Member States has been developed and will be refined and tested in 2010.

Ensuring fair and efficient asylum procedures

The Asylum System Quality Assurance and Evaluation Mechanism Project allowed the Office to more effectively

assess capacities and shortfalls in national asylum systems in Central Europe. UNHCR's interventions led to improved practices that affected the overall quality of asylum systems. Countries participating in the project took steps to establish quality audit units in order to systematically monitor asylum decisions. Three countries in this subregion (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovenia) also took part in UNHCR's Asylum Procedures Directive research project.

Promoting integration and resettlement in Central Europe

UNHCR published a *Note and Agenda for the Integration of Refugees in Central Europe*, which was translated into seven languages and widely distributed. The Office also initiated the development of a tool to evaluate refugee integration, which will be piloted in 2010. Difficulties with local integration in the region often trigger irregular movements of asylum-seekers and others in search of better conditions elsewhere.

Several countries in this subregion have started small-scale resettlement programmes. The Emergency Transit Centre in Romania, officially opened in 2009, hosted more than 400 refugees on their way to resettlement in third countries. A second ad hoc facility in the Slovak Republic increased UNHCR's capacity for evacuation of refugees needing resettlement.

| Constraints |

The global economic downturn affected the ability of States in the subregion to protect refugees, particularly governmental efforts to aid local integration. Negative public attitudes towards refugees and asylum-seekers remained of concern throughout the region.

| Operations |

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

In the **Baltic States**, where UNHCR has a presence only in Lithuania, UNHCR focused on ensuring access to territory, preventing *refoulement* and improving reception conditions and asylum procedures. Asylum authorities were trained in the identification of asylum-seekers with special needs and the application of gender-sensitive asylum procedures, helping to improve their awareness of international law and best practices. The *Handbook for Parliamentarians on Nationality and Statelessness* was translated into Estonian to support the country's initiatives in this area.

In **Bulgaria**, which is preparing to join the Schengen area, border monitoring remained a priority for UNHCR. The Border Police, UNHCR and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) concluded a Memorandum of Understanding on Border Monitoring. The aim was to prevent *refoulement* and ensure that new arrivals' asylum claims were registered and forwarded to the competent authorities. The BHC carried out more than 240 monitoring visits and verified more than 700 cases of individual irregular migrants in border custody.

In **Cyprus**, UNHCR used the outcomes of informal surveys of those receiving protection to advocate for improved integration policies and practices, as well as access to naturalization for those meeting the criteria. A series of small-scale interventions created employment or language-training opportunities for beneficiaries. UNHCR intervened to ensure that the asylum applications of persons in detention were processed rapidly, and no cases of prolonged detention of asylum-seekers were reported.

The participation of **Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovenia** in the Asylum Procedures Directive Project allowed for the systematic review of asylum case files and first-instance decisions in order to assess national legislation and practice against the Asylum Procedures Directive standards. Specific areas for improvement were identified, such as the need for specialized training for newly recruited caseworkers and guidelines on how to interview persons with special needs.

In **Hungary**, UNHCR made strategic interventions and advocated for the introduction of a national resettlement programme. A Working Group on resettlement, including the relevant authorities and UNHCR, was set up and visited the Emergency Transit Centre in Romania.

In **Poland**, UNHCR lobbied successfully for amendments to the Law on the Educational System, which resulted in better access to schools for asylum-seeking and refugee children. UNHCR's advocacy helped prevent changes to the regulation on assistance to asylum-seekers, which would have worsened reception conditions. Relevant stakeholders (including police and reception workers) were trained to implement the proper procedures when addressing sexual and gender-based violence.

In **Romania**, UNHCR made progress in finding durable solutions, including local integration and resettlement. For instance, Romania decided in 2009 to resettle 40 Myanmar refugees from Malaysia. More than 400 persons were resettled after transiting through the Emergency Transit Centre in Timisoara.

UNHCR encouraged the **Slovak Republic** to take steps to establish an integration policy. UNHCR is an *ad hoc* member of a newly-created governmental steering committee for migration and integration. The Government signed an agreement with UNHCR and IOM on the evacuation and temporary transfer of almost 100 Palestinian refugees from Al Waleed camp in Iraq. Though the Government's withdrawal from a border-monitoring agreement was a setback, negotiations on a new agreement are underway.

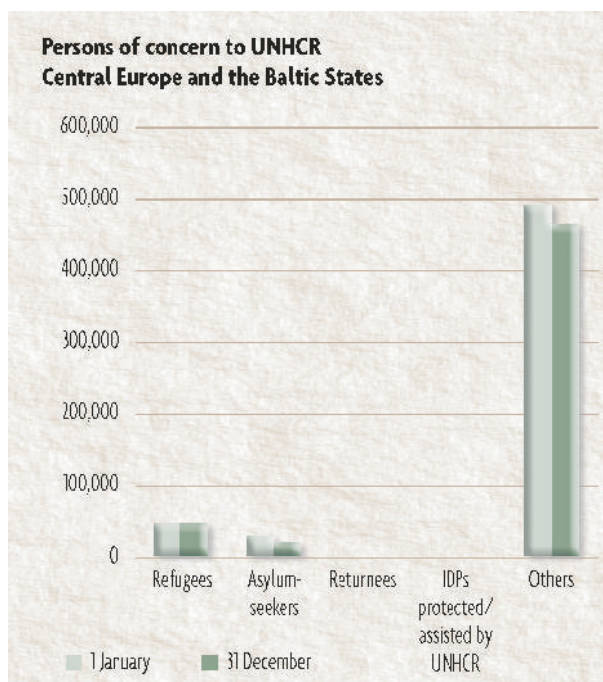
In **Slovenia**, the systematic provision of social and legal services through UNHCR's partners and the monitoring of reception conditions through regular visits to reception facilities benefited asylum-seekers. Internet services and a kindergarten were made available in the reception centre. The working group on sexual and gender-based violence, which includes UNHCR, met on a regular basis and resolved four cases in 2009.

Financial information

The budget for this subregion remained fairly stable in 2009 compared to 2008, noting that the 2009 costs of operating the Emergency Transit Centre in Romania are reflected in the budget of the Division of International Protection.

The 2009 budget continues to include a small amount to complement material assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in Bulgaria and Romania.

It was evident in 2009 that additional resources were needed for UNHCR to carry out its mandate functions in Turkey.



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	826,891	0	826,891	797,122	0	797,122
Cyprus	922,162	0	922,162	824,541	0	824,541
Czech Republic	445,914	0	445,914	370,292	0	370,292
Hungary	3,280,455	0	3,280,455	3,142,087	0	3,142,087
Poland	712,761	0	712,761	564,926	0	564,926
Romania	1,171,272	0	1,171,272	988,980	0	988,980
Slovakia	791,678	99,000	890,678	569,273	2,951	572,223
Slovenia	170,000	0	170,000	63,894	0	63,894
Turkey	6,449,699	1,695,650	8,145,349	5,774,096	1,449,963	7,224,059
Regional activities ¹	100,000	0	100,000	56,784	0	56,784
Total	14,870,832	1,794,650	16,665,482	13,151,995	1,452,914	14,604,909

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 promotion of refugee law.

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

Earmarking	Donor	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Central Europe and Baltic States subregion	Sweden	260,078		260,078
	United States of America	3,400,000		3,400,000
	Central Europe and Baltic States subtotal	3,660,078		3,660,078
Cyprus	Cyprus	14,447		14,447
	Private donors in Cyprus	10,513		10,513
	Private donors in Italy	27,579		27,579
	Cyprus subtotal	52,539		52,539
Hungary	European Commission	388,783		388,783
	Hungary subtotal	388,783		388,783
Romania	United States of America	191,524		191,524
	Romania subtotal	191,524		191,524
Slovak Republic	United States of America	304,919		304,919
	Slovak Republic subtotal	304,919		304,919
Turkey	European Commission		539,557	539,557
	Private donors in Turkey	7,402		7,402
	United Kingdom	45,662		45,662
	USA for UNHCR	60,450		60,450
	Turkey subtotal	113,514	539,557	653,071
Total		4,711,357	539,557	5,250,914

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.