

Central Europe

- Bulgaria
- Czech Republic
- Hungary
- Poland
- Romania
- Slovak Republic
- Slovenia

Resettled refugees from Myanmar are learning Czech with their teacher in Ralsko, Czech Republic.



| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- The Further Developing Quality (FDQ) project, designed to improve the quality of national asylum procedures, was completed in 2011. It integrated quality assurance mechanisms in the structure of Government bodies working on asylum in the five countries in the subregion participating in the project (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic).
- Numerous cross-border coordination events took place among border management actors, including those from countries outside the European Union (EU), such as Croatia, Serbia and

Ukraine. These events served to enhance the capacity of border guards and to strengthen coordination of asylum procedures, and to prevent *refoulement*.

- Amidst increasing concerns over the rise in administrative detention of asylum-seekers, UNHCR strengthened its monitoring of the practice of detention in countries of Central Europe. As a result, Poland and the Czech Republic began exploring the possibilities of introducing alternatives to detention, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as families with children.



- UNHCR helped the authorities to address deficiencies in the integration services provided to recognized refugees, those holding subsidiary protection status, and resettled refugees in the Czech Republic and Romania. A regional resettlement meeting allowed new and aspiring resettlement countries in the subregion to exchange information on good practices and challenges, with a view to establishing resettlement programmes with effective integration services.

Working environment

The economic situation in Central Europe remained relatively stable in 2011, largely due to strict austerity measures and budget cuts by governments during the past few years. The plan for Romania and Bulgaria to join the Schengen zone in 2011 did not materialize, hence the dynamics vis-à-vis external Schengen and EU borders on the eastern front remained largely unchanged during 2011.

The year also saw two EU Member States of the subregion - Hungary and Poland - assume the EU Presidency. Issues of migration and asylum were priorities for both States as the EU faced an increasing numbers of arrivals from North Africa while coping with the EU-wide economic crisis.

There was a small rise in the number of asylum applications in Central Europe in 2011, which stood at 13,200, compared to 12,300 applications the previous year, while the number of those recognized as refugees according to the 1951 Refugee Convention continued to decline.

Achievements and impact

Access to territory and asylum procedures

Central European countries continued to monitor the Schengen and external EU borders through UNHCR's implementing partners. There were numerous instances of cross-border intra-regional coordination among border management actors, including those from countries outside the EU, such as Croatia, Serbia and Ukraine. UNHCR also strengthened its monitoring of detention in view of increased concerns over the rise in the administrative detention of asylum-seekers.

Fair and efficient asylum procedures

The FDQ project in Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary and the Slovak Republic, which aimed at consolidating quality assurance mechanisms previously set up within the national asylum systems, was successfully completed in September 2011, with auditing mechanisms installed in most of the participating countries. As follow-up, UNHCR undertook region-wide research on how asylum adjudicators assessed the perceived availability of internal flight alternatives in the asylum decision-making process.

Dignified reception conditions

UNHCR and its partners continued to monitor reception conditions in Central Europe through regular visits and participatory assessments conducted by multi-disciplinary teams. Many practical challenges were resolved through the amendment of relevant laws, and through discussions with

reception management authorities. However, some key concerns of UNHCR, such as the closed nature of many reception facilities, remained unresolved.

◉ *Integration and resettlement*

Although UNHCR was not able to launch its integration evaluation tool due to insufficient funding, it succeeded in helping the authorities to address deficiencies in integration services available for recognized refugees, those holding subsidiary protection status, and refugees accepted for resettlement in the Czech Republic and Romania. UNHCR's regional resettlement meeting provided a forum for new and aspiring resettlement countries in the subregion to exchange information on good practices and review outstanding challenges, particularly with respect to building enough capacity to establish effective resettlement programmes and sound integration services.

| Constraints |

The political climate in 2011 was not favourable to asylum, as governments tightened border controls, increasingly detained asylum-seekers, and further restricted the implementation of asylum and integration laws. In some countries, notably Hungary and Bulgaria, there was an increase in xenophobic violence against minority groups (mostly Roma). Although people of concern to UNHCR were not the specific targets of such violence, the prevailing political and social environment was not conducive to their protection.

Against this background, growing public frustration over the economic crisis and internal political tensions led to changes of Governments in Romania, Slovenia and the Slovak Republic. Although all Governments in the subregion benefited to some extent from the European Refugee Fund (ERF), they allocated fewer resources to the services provided to refugees and asylum-seekers.

| Operations |

In **Bulgaria**, UNHCR's systematic monitoring in partnership with NGOs, and continuous dialogue with Government counterparts, gave rise to specific recommendations to the authorities on critical aspects of the country's asylum system, such as the detention of people of concern and insufficient reception and integration services. UNHCR's implementing partner provided legal counselling to people of concern.

As a positive development, the end of 2011 saw Bulgaria one step closer to ratification of the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions, with the relevant draft legislation submitted to Parliament for adoption in early 2012.

UNHCR in the **Czech Republic** worked with partners to strengthen the monitoring of the Prague international airport and of reception and detention facilities. To aid integration, UNHCR published an *Education Handbook for Refugee Parents* in five languages. The Office also lobbied successfully for the resumption of language training under a national integration programme.

In **Hungary**, the increasing use of administrative detention of asylum-seekers by the authorities continued to be of great concern. UNHCR's advocacy resulted in halting arbitrary detention, in closing down sub-standard temporary detention facilities, and in providing social assistance.

The successful implementation of the FDQ project in Hungary has led to greater cooperation between UNHCR and the Government in addressing challenges arising from the implementation of their current asylum system.

In **Poland**, UNHCR's collaboration with border authorities and with a partner NGO helped ensure the access of asylum-seekers to the territory and to asylum procedures. UNHCR also played an important role in the development of the draft National Migration Policy (NMP) by providing substantive input, and organizing a tripartite meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Interior and of civil society. The NMP document, accepted by the Inter-Ministerial Group on Migration in July 2011, will shape Poland's long-term refugee and migration policy.

In **Romania**, the Emergency Transit Centre (ETC) in Timisoara continued to offer a safe haven to people of concern to UNHCR in the process of resettlement and in need of urgent evacuation from their countries of asylum. UNHCR also advocated for better reception and integration services, and called for more support for this new resettlement country.

In the **Slovak Republic**, UNHCR and its NGO partner engaged in border-monitoring activities in the absence of a formal agreement with the Government. The ETC in Humenne, in eastern Slovakia, reopened after a year's closure and received 46 Afghan refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 40 Somali refugees from Eritrea, in 2011.

In **Slovenia**, where UNHCR does not have an office, cooperation with the NGO partner on border monitoring continued. UNHCR also trained border police in asylum issues, and was able to improve contacts between its implementing partners, the Government and asylum-seekers.

Budget and expenditure in Central Europe | USD

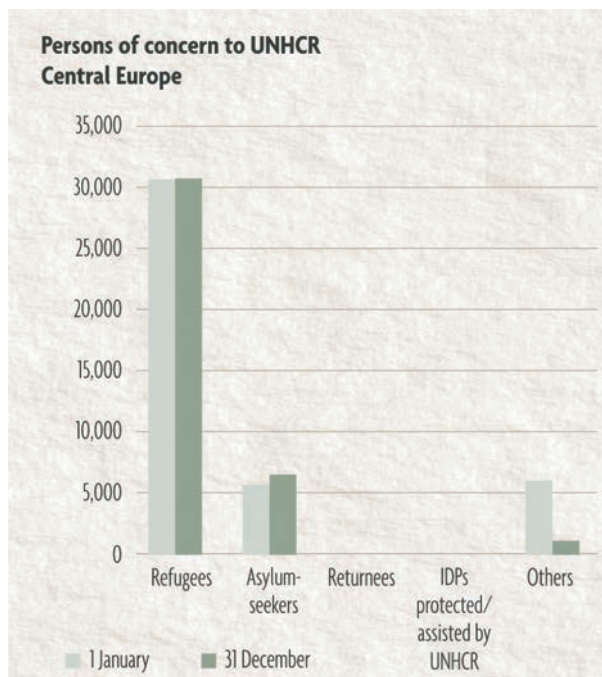
Country		PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 2 Stateless programme	Total
Hungary Regional Office¹	Budget	9,695,418	648,188	10,343,606
	Expenditure	7,835,611	502,769	8,338,380
	Total budget	9,695,418	648,188	10,343,606
	Total expenditure	7,835,611	502,769	8,338,380

¹Includes activities in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

UNHCR continued to advocate for Slovenia's accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Decisions by the Slovenian Constitutional Court and by the European Court of Human Rights led the Government and Parliament to adopt legislation ensuring the re-registration of those previously deemed "Erased Persons", and help them reacquire their lost permanent residency status.

Financial information

Some 80 per cent of requirements for the subregion were covered in 2011. This enabled UNHCR to deliver on most of its priorities, especially advocacy and capacity building, despite some significant exchange-rate losses.



Voluntary contributions to Central Europe | USD

Earmarking / Donor	PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	All pillars	Total
CENTRAL EUROPE SUBREGION			
United States of America		1,300,000	1,300,000
Central Europe subtotal	0	1,300,000	1,300,000
HUNGARY REGIONAL OFFICE			
International Organization for Migration	16,979		16,979
United States of America	718,500		718,500
Hungary Regional Office subtotal	735,479	0	735,479
Total	735,479	1,300,000	2,035,479