



Central Europe and the Baltic States

Working environment

A major focus among European Union members in the Central Europe and Baltic States region will be the continued implementation of the Union's directives on asylum. Efforts are under way to incorporate Brussels' asylum legislation into Member States' legal frameworks, while at the same time upholding applicable international standards. UNHCR is closely associated with the process and will monitor all related developments, including those that arise following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Union in January 2007.

Some 8,800 asylum applications were recorded in this subregion (excluding Turkey) in the first six months of 2006. This was a decline of more than 30 per cent from the same period in 2005. The nine new Member States of the European Union in this region received almost 7,600 new asylum requests, almost 40 per cent fewer than in the first six months of 2005. Among the countries experiencing a significant decrease were Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus (down by 76 per cent, 50 per cent and 48 per cent respectively).

Despite the current fall in the number of asylum applications in the subregion, it should not be forgotten that due to their location on the borders of the European Union, Central European countries face considerable pressure from broader migration movements. This makes the need for greater cooperation and burden- and responsibility- sharing among the Union's Member States all the more acute.

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



Strategy

The Central European States that joined the European Union in May 2004 have become important entry points into Western Europe for asylum-seekers and refugees. In this context, UNHCR's operational strategy is to ensure that all asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern in the region receive harmonized treatment within a common European asylum system, no matter where they enter the Union. In 2007 UNHCR will redouble efforts to convince governments in the region to assume their full responsibilities towards asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern.

UNHCR's regional strategy is built upon four priorities, which are:

- the access of asylum-seekers to the territory of the States and to appropriate asylum procedures;
- adequate reception facilities and conditions in accordance with international standards;
- high-quality refugee status determination by States; and
- prospects for recognized refugees to integrate into their host communities.

Furthermore, UNHCR has reconfigured its presence in Europe around six regional offices, which are responsible for overseeing the work of other UNHCR offices

under their geographical coverage. Besides being more cost-effective, the new arrangement encourages the formulation of regional strategies.

Constraints

The changing pattern of asylum continues to pose a challenge to countries in the region. This is especially the case with mixed population movements in which asylum-seekers need to be distinguished from other migrants, both legal and illegal. The pressure of these large movements of people, coupled with security concerns related to terrorism, has led to increased border controls. It has also given rise to a tendency to impose more restrictive asylum measures in the context of the European Union's directives.

One of the consequences of the economic austerity programmes introduced by governments in the region has been a reduction in funding for the maintenance and development of national asylum systems and infrastructure. This trend is of particular concern to UNHCR, as States bear the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting asylum-seekers and refugees.

UNHCR will make every effort to ensure that asylum systems in the region receive the necessary human, financial and material support from the governments



Poland. Education of refugee children helps their chances of integration into their new communities. UNHCR / M. Sunjic.

concerned. It will also ensure that civil society groups participate in asylum systems. Funding is crucial for these strategic interventions.

Operations

Information on UNHCR's operations in **Turkey** is provided separately in the next chapter. This section covers the rest of Central Europe and the Baltic States.

Access to asylum systems and procedures

To ensure that the principle of *non-refoulement* is respected, UNHCR will focus on systematic and independent monitoring at airports and other entry points at land and sea borders. Border guards, NGO staff, lawyers and other actors will be trained in the correct procedures.

Asylum-seekers will continue to be provided with relevant protection information, such as the 1951 Convention, the Dublin II regulation and European Union directives. UNHCR will also do its best to ensure that any detention of asylum-seekers is limited and in compliance with international law. Furthermore, it will monitor detention facilities, push for compliance with its guidelines on detention and provide legal assistance to detained asylum-seekers.

Adequate reception conditions in accordance with international standards

UNHCR will make every effort to ensure that the material, psychosocial, legal and protection needs of asylum-seekers are addressed while taking account of diversity, age, gender and special needs. It will raise awareness of issues such as sexual and gender-based violence and separated children with governments, NGOs, the legal profession and others. UNHCR will also encourage asylum-seekers to participate in the management and servicing of accommodation centres.

Quality refugee status determination (RSD)

UNHCR will advocate for the inclusive interpretation of the 1951 Convention and try to ensure that the transposition of European Union asylum directives into national law respects international standards. It will monitor status determination procedures through regular visits to facilities, random spot checks and scrutiny of procedures, interviews and files.

Effective integration of recognized refugees

The primary durable solution for refugees in the region continues to be local integration. However, recognized refugees trying to integrate into their new communities face difficulties in learning the national language, finding jobs, acquiring housing and accessing social services. These common difficulties were clearly demonstrated during an assessment carried out in several countries by joint government, NGO and UNHCR teams in 2005. While UNHCR is not in a position to solve all the problems related to integration, it will continue to encourage action by governments, NGOs and the refugees themselves to find practical solutions.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Bulgaria	1,042,971	846,372
Cyprus	838,791	710,813
Czech Republic	927,603	420,643
Hungary	2,364,094	2,060,516
Poland	955,036	807,938
Romania	1,092,737	979,681
Slovakia	762,151	496,666
Slovenia	380,121	194,000
Turkey	7,065,521	6,716,171
Regional activities ¹	300,000	240,000
Total	15,729,025	13,472,800

¹ Includes promotion of refugee law.

