

## Background and scope

1. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to dire predictions in the west of massive population movements. Many in Western Europe feared that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would be unable (or unwilling) to prevent a westward flood of migrants and refugees.
2. Although these concerns have subsequently proven to be largely unfounded, they nonetheless contributed to widespread interest in strengthening the capacity of governments throughout the region to handle refugee problems. Within a short time, UNHCR had established a presence in 14 countries throughout the region where the Office and the concept of refugee protection were practically unknown.
3. UNHCR also had comparatively little knowledge and experience of the region. Innovative ways had to be found to encourage these relatively highly developed countries to apply international standards to refugees and displaced persons with a minimum of outside assistance.
4. A wide variety of activities were launched, aimed at enabling governmental and non-governmental institutions and civic society in general to deal with population movements and refugee problems - in short, assisting the State to do its job.
5. These activities have been defined as "capacity building", a term which covers such measures as awareness-raising for the population at large, promotion of refugee law, institution building, supporting and strengthening NGOs, giving professional training and even providing office and logistic equipment.
6. UNHCR's capacity-building activities have helped countries apply international standards and contributed to the integration of Central European countries with Western Europe. Furthermore, capacity-building has proved to be the most useful and economical means of assisting governments in the region.
7. To assess the effectiveness and impact of capacity-building in the region, the UNHCR Inspection and Evaluation Service, at the request of the Regional Bureau for Europe, commissioned an expert consultant in 1996 to review this activity and suggest improvements where needed.  
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8. Field studies for the review were conducted in Vienna (where the UNHCR Regional Office covers Poland and the Czech and Slovak Republics as well as Austria itself), Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.  
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