

Western Europe

Austria
Belgium
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Liechtenstein
Luxembourg
Malta
Monaco
Netherlands
Norway
Portugal
San Marino
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom

Recent Developments

During the first eight months of 2001, some 245,000 persons applied for asylum in Western European countries. This represents a 2.5 per cent increase over the same period last year. Six countries – Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Austria and Belgium – together received slightly over 80 per cent of all asylum applications lodged in Western Europe during that period. The five main countries of origin were Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of China.

There is a fairly widespread misapprehension that the increase in the number of asylum-seekers is a consequence of Western European States moving away from the restrictive policies and practices of the recent past. Rather, it is evidence of the continuing cycle, in many parts of the world, of violence, persecution and ethnic conflict. In the face of this suffering, stringent controls have plainly failed to dissuade desperate people from using desperate means – including the services of human smugglers – to reach safety.

The European debate on migration, while still heavily concentrating on deterrence and prevention of irregular migration, is now widening to include the issues of skilled labour shortages and population ageing. These developments are of great interest to UNHCR, not least because the protection of refugees has long been caught up in difficulties associated with the complex question of how to manage international migration. In particular, a re-opening of labour migration channels might relieve some of the migration pressure in low and middle-income countries, thereby helping to disentangle people in need of protection from the broader flow of economic migration.

Unfortunately, the continued growth in human smuggling and trafficking seems to have increased the trend towards the criminalisation of asylum-seekers and refugees in Western Europe.

Unfortunately, there is now the possibility that this tendency could be exacerbated by the horrific events of 11 September 2001 in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington. In the aftermath of these events, States are introducing or examining a wide range of measures intended to build adequate security safeguards into their asylum procedures. UNHCR fully supports resolute multilateral efforts directed at effectively combating terrorism, but it remains conscious of the risk that unwarranted linkages could be made



between refugees and terrorists. In other words, UNHCR insists that refugee protection must not become a victim of international terrorism.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR had two broad aims for Western Europe in 2001: maintaining the quality of asylum, and widening political and material support to refugees and UNHCR's work worldwide. These are challenges that UNHCR will continue to address over the coming months and years.

In light of progress being made towards the harmonisation of asylum and migration policies and practices in European Union Member States, and the acceleration of the Union's enlargement process, UNHCR has to explore several closely interconnected avenues leading to the goal of furthering refugee protection as a global concern. This means UNHCR must advocate:

- effective management of mixed population movements into Western Europe;
- rebuilding trust and confidence in the asylum system;

- sustained efforts to eliminate racial discrimination and to combat xenophobia and intolerance of refugees and asylum-seekers;
- expanding the pool of resettlement countries;
- European Union support for institution and capacity-building measures to strengthen refugee protection in countries of first asylum; and
- increased, predictable and flexible funding.

Operations

Harmonisation of European Asylum Policy

UNHCR has long maintained that harmonised regional approaches – the European Union being the strongest example – provide the most promising means of strengthening refugee protection. The European Union institutions and its Member States have been at work on the harmonisation agenda, since the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, taking a two-stage approach: first, the harmonisation of minimum standards; and second, the development of a common European asylum system.

By October 2001, two legally binding Community instruments had been adopted: the European Refugee Fund, which provides for the allocation of funds to Member States according to the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in their territory; and a directive on Temporary Protection. A number of legislative proposals have been put forward by the European Commission and are currently awaiting adoption by the Member States: they deal with family reunification; asylum procedures; reception conditions; allocation of responsibility for asylum processing; and Convention refugee status and forms of protection complementary to that offered by the 1951 Convention to refugees as defined therein.

One of UNHCR's key activities in Europe has been, and remains, the provision of expert advice and comments on EU legislative proposals. This important role was envisaged in a

policies takes as its baseline the highest standards of refugee protection.

Strengthened Asylum Systems

In this era of globalisation in communications and economics, migration trends are very much part of the environment in which refugee protection has to be realised. Western European States have understandable worries about what they describe as the uncontrolled growth of migration. In this context, UNHCR's primary challenge is to preserve the institution of asylum and to ensure that effective protection is provided to those people who need it, while taking into account the legitimate concerns of States about the increase in human smuggling and trafficking, and the real or perceived misuse of asylum systems by non-refugees.



UK: Asylum-seekers and refugees in an assistance service centre. *UNHCR/A. Johnstone.*

Declaration attached to the Amsterdam Treaty and a subsequent co-operation framework signed between the European Commission (Directorate General for Justice and Home Affairs) and UNHCR. Through active dialogue and co-operation with the European Union institutions and the Member States, UNHCR seeks to ensure that the harmonisation of asylum

Ensuring access to territory and to asylum procedures, adequate reception standards for asylum-seekers and effective integration of refugees remain the key areas of UNHCR's promotional and advocacy activities in each of the Western European countries. These issues now have a particular resonance in the light of the 11 September 2001 events in the United States,

which UNHCR fears will only add to the pressure from certain quarters for more stringent asylum policies. UNHCR will work closely with States in an effort to ensure that measures taken to combat terrorism strike a proper balance between national security and refugee protection.

Public Information, Advocacy and Partnership

The experience of many asylum-seekers and refugees in European countries is one of profound distress. The host community may be less than welcoming, seeing them as a threat to social stability, jobs, cultural identity and a strain on public services. As more and more people arrive in Europe, especially from very different cultures, there are increasing manifestations of racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

These problems are largely rooted in fear and ignorance. A sound public information strategy therefore remains central to UNHCR's protection objective in Europe. A better understanding of – and support for – refugees and asylum-seekers will in the first instance stem from accurate and up-to-date information: on the numbers of people in need of protection, where that protection is being provided and in what form. A fuller, human picture will help reduce the incidence of racism and xenophobia.

UNHCR's public information activities and networking seek to involve the refugees and asylum-seekers themselves, capitalising on the kind of momentum achieved by "The Refugee Perspective," a meeting of refugees hosted by UNHCR in September 2001. That meeting brought together some 70 refugees in Europe to provide, through their own eyes, a reality check on the international community's efforts to give better protection to refugees world wide. In the course of 2002, a number of follow-up thematic workshops will be organised to highlight the perspectives of refugees with first-hand experience of European reception and integration policies and practices.

Resource Mobilisation

UNHCR cannot carry out its mandate, to provide international protection and find durable solutions, without adequate support from governments. Many European States provide generous funding for UNHCR's refugee protection and assistance programmes throughout the world. Unfortunately this

support does not meet UNHCR's needs. It is essential, therefore, that UNHCR offices in Europe take the initiative in reaching out to European governments, parliaments and regional organisations. UNHCR will also seek to broaden its donor base through a more consistent and results-oriented strategy for private and corporate sector fund-raising.

UNHCR's message to European Governments is clear: the best way to address Europe's refugee problem is not to lower refugee protection standards, but to invest creatively in resolving the refugee crisis worldwide. There is a need for increased political and financial support to UNHCR's voluntary repatriation and reintegration programmes, and related local integration activities. These programmes should be seen not only in terms of achieving durable solutions to refugee problems, but also in terms of reducing the desperation that drives refugees and asylum-seekers into Europe.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Austria	1,467,182
Belgium	2,165,510
France	1,764,967
Germany	1,797,050
Greece	1,002,659
Ireland	370,959
Italy	1,327,771
Malta	204,700
Netherlands	252,037
Portugal	104,600
Spain	845,351
Sweden	1,096,625
Switzerland	680,007
United Kingdom	1,218,488
Total	14,297,906

