

Update on UNHCR's Operations in Europe
Executive Committee 2007
(Revised version)

Part A: Major Developments

- In Western and Central Europe, asylum, migration and security issues remain at the core of regional and national political debates. UNHCR, Governments and many other partners face continuing challenges. These include the harmonization process of asylum laws and practices within the European Union; the need for visionary reception policies and practices to facilitate integration prospects for those in need of international protection, while ensuring the safe and dignified return of rejected asylum-seekers; the support for and further development of responses to mixed migratory movements across the southern and eastern borders of the European Union, and operational and solutions-oriented approaches in the western Balkans and eastern Europe.
- As irregular arrivals of people on the Mediterranean shores continue, UNHCR has actively supported the Governments involved (Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain) to address specific concerns and ensure that asylum-seekers have access to adequate procedures. UNHCR's 10-Point Plan for addressing protection aspects of mixed migratory movements is being operationalized through regional implementation plans in southern European countries and on the eastern and south-eastern borders of the European Union.
- In June 2007, UNHCR appointed a staff member to ensure coordination with Frontex, the European agency for the management of operational cooperation between Member States regard to border security. UNHCR and Frontex are working on a cooperation agreement
- In June, the European Commission issued its "Green Paper" on the future common European asylum system. UNHCR welcomes the broad consultative process launched by the Commission, and will provide its response in advance of the public hearing on the system which the Commission will convene in the autumn.
- In south-eastern Europe, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) remains high, despite a significant decrease by almost 100,000 individuals achieved by UNHCR in cooperation with its partners under the "3 x 3 process". The Sarajevo Declaration on Refugee Returns continues to provide an opportunity for addressing obstacles related to returns effectively. The signing in July 2007 of an agreement on a regional programme for refugee returns in the western Balkans between UNHCR and the European Commission has given new impetus to the enhancement of durable solutions for the remaining refugees and IDPs.
- UNHCR has also strengthened its activities for people displaced from and within the province of Kosovo, in the Republic of Serbia. Particular attention is being paid to the needs of vulnerable displaced groups in collective accommodation centres, as well as of severely marginalized displaced Roma, Ashkaeli and

Egyptians. Since October 2006, UNHCR with its partners has begun to implement a regional legal assistance project in Serbia, including in Kosovo, as well as in Montenegro, focusing on civil registration, access to documentation, and capacity building of relevant authorities to reduce the risk of statelessness. The project will also advocate for the full realization of the rights of the Roma, Ashakaeli and Egyptians. The civil registration component of the project has assisted more than 1,500 members of the Roma, Ashakaeli and Egyptians communities since January 2007 and approximately 1200 are in the process of being registered. The current situation of the Roma, Ashakaeli and Egyptians represents a serious human rights and security problem in the region. In many ways, the IDP situation and identification of durable solutions for displaced populations are conditioned by the uncertainty over the status of Kosovo.

- The deteriorating security situation in Ingushetia has led to the closure of the UNHCR office and is hampering the delivery of assistance to more than 15,000 people who are displaced from Chechnya. UNHCR's permanent presence in the region remains limited to Vladikavkaz from where short missions to Ingushetia and Chechnya are organized, security permitting.
- In Georgia, work is continuing on the follow-up activities with regard to the recently adopted National IDP Strategy, in particular the finalization of an Action Plan. Furthermore, UNHCR has begun the implementation of a project to strengthen regional protection capacity, funded by the European Commission. Through this project, gaps identified in the national asylum system of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia will be addressed and courses of action will be proposed to the concerned Governments and the donor community
- The number of asylum-seekers in Turkey has nearly doubled compared to the corresponding months of 2006, some 40 per cent of them originating from Iraq. Following the introduction of UNHCR's enhanced registration and assessment procedures, more than 1,800 Iraqi mandate refugees were submitted for resettlement to the United States of America and some 348 departures had taken place by 30 August. UNHCR coordinates the required exit permissions with both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Office has also made several interventions with the Turkish authorities in efforts to stop the deportation of refugees and asylum-seekers from Turkey. UNHCR hopes that asylum and protection matters will be high on the political agenda of the newly elected President and Government as there is a need to establish adequate mechanisms to deal in a protection-sensitive manner with irregular migrants arriving in Turkey.

Part B: Progress on Strategic Objectives and Agenda for Protection

- On the occasion of a Ministerial meeting on integration convened by the German Presidency of the European Union, UNHCR published a note on the integration of refugees in the European Union. UNHCR's "Recommendations to the Portuguese Government for its European Union Presidency during the second half of 2007" were issued on 15 June 2007.
- In June, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and UNHCR met to discuss the latest trends in migration, the risk to lives, and search and rescue

obligations, including issues surrounding disembarkation. UNHCR's focus is on rescue at sea and on how maritime law, coupled with political will and international cooperation could provide a proper response to people in need of international protection within broader migration movements. UNHCR and the IMO intend to work closely together and will hold a high-level inter-agency meeting to forge closer cooperation with all agencies involved to find ways to help alleviate this problem.

- UNHCR continued to promote refugee resettlement in Europe, by organizing and participating in a side meeting for Member States of the European Union on the occasion of UNHCR's Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement held in Geneva in June. The Office participates in several resettlement advocacy efforts by European non-governmental organizations, and promotes resettlement in those European countries that have not yet taken part in resettlement efforts. Portugal announced a new resettlement programme on the occasion of the High Commissioner's visit to Lisbon in June 2007. Work is continuing to establish an Emergency Transit Facility in Romania.
- The Bureau has engaged with Governments to promote appropriate recognition of international protection needs of Iraqi asylum-seekers in Europe and increased harmonization of the assessment of all asylum claims. The approach to asylum applications from Iraqis continues to vary considerably across Europe, with many of them unable to find the protection they need.
- The respective representations of UNHCR and of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Brussels have begun to work on a joint venture funded by the European Refugee Fund to produce a tool kit for teachers on refugees and migration entitled "Not just numbers". The kit is intended to help middle and high school teachers across the European Union to address issues of asylum and migration and is due to be launched in 2008.
- UNHCR has launched a research project to assess the implementation of the "Qualification Directive" in selected Member States. The results will be published in October, the first anniversary of the deadline for transposition of this directive into national law.
- The Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP) and UNHCR have finalized a joint survey on guardianship systems for refugee children. The report covers the systems, legislation and practices for unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum in Europe. The objective of the survey is to draw attention to the particularly vulnerable situation of unaccompanied and separated children. Through a protection gaps analysis, it also aims to flag areas of guardianship provision that may need further regularization and standardization, based on the relevant international and regional standards of protection and care for asylum-seeker and refugee children and adolescents.
- The High Commissioner's special project "UNHCR's focused action to prevent violence against refugee women and children" was introduced to reduce the number of incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and to increase and improve UNHCR's response to survivors of violence through

services, education and livelihood opportunities. Four projects are currently being implemented in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Malta with a total cost of USD 400,000. They focus specifically on prevention and response to SGBV through advocacy, community mobilization and reinforcing national referral and response mechanisms, with special attention being given to the establishment and maintenance of shelters for survivors of violence.

UNHCR
3 October 2007