



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

Western Europe

Working environment

The number of asylum claims in Western Europe fell in 2006. In the first six months of the year some 89,000 people applied for asylum in the region, compared with some 112,000 over the same period in 2005, a reduction of 18 per cent. A few countries reported marked decreases: asylum claims in Luxembourg and France were down by 55 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively, while both Finland and Greece saw declines of 38 per cent. On the other hand Portugal, Malta and Sweden faced increases of 22 per cent, 20 per cent and 11 per cent. Statistics for the Netherlands showed an increase of 71 per cent in asylum claims, though this included repeat applications and those of resettled refugees who arrived in the first half of the year.

Despite the overall decrease, asylum remains one of the most sensitive political issues in many European Union (EU) Member States. Immigration, which encompasses issues related to both legal and illegal migration, refugees, asylum-seekers and returns, remains high on the political agenda.

Much attention is focused on the arrival of undocumented migrants on Western Europe's Mediterranean shores. The Canary Islands saw a significant rise in the number of arrivals in 2006, despite the dangers of the sea voyage. Boatloads continued to arrive in Italy (most notably in Lampedusa), Malta and Greece. Given the mixed nature of the inflows, UNHCR's priority is to ensure that those in need of international protection can access the asylum system in the country of arrival.



A distinct category of arrivals from Lebanon was observed in Cyprus, and to a lesser extent in Greece. Cyprus, in particular, was used as a transit point for evacuees from Lebanon. Although the arrivals were mainly third-country nationals, a number of Lebanese citizens had also left their country in this manner.

Strategy

In line with its Global Strategic Objectives and the *Agenda for Protection*, UNHCR in Western Europe will focus on asylum law, policy and practice at both the national and EU levels. In the face of ever-stricter government policies in the region, the organization will continue to work towards ensuring access to territories and asylum procedures, and to monitor the quality of national asylum systems. Gender, age and diversity will be taken into account in all aspects of UNHCR's work. The Office will also foster a more receptive environment for refugees and others in need of international protection. To support these objectives, the Office will continue to cultivate strategic partnerships with the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Centre for Migration Policy and Development (ICPMD), other organizations and institutions, as well as NGOs.

UNHCR will attach strategic importance to steering EU asylum policy in a direction that supports the international protection regime. The promotion of resettlement will receive particular attention. Offices in major European capitals will also play a key role in mobilizing political and financial support for refugees and the work of UNHCR globally.

In the context of the regionalization process launched by UNHCR in Europe, offices in Berlin and Rome will assume full regional responsibilities by the beginning of 2007. Their functions will include coordinating strategy at the subregional level and providing administrative and operational support to countries covered by these offices.

Constraints

In Western Europe, asylum and migration remain politically sensitive issues despite the significant decline in the number of asylum-seekers. Little distinction is made by the public between refugees, others in need of international protection and economic migrants. States in general remain more focused on migration control. In this climate, UNHCR ensures that appropriate procedures are in place to identify asylum-seekers, grant them access to States' territories and ensure their fair treatment. The challenges many governments face in the integration of immigrants have lessened their willingness to receive those in need of international protection.



To establish who needs international protection among mixed migration flows, UNHCR insists on access to migrants who make it to European shores, like this group intercepted by the Italian Coast Guard off the coast of Lampedusa. *UNHCR / L. Boldrini*

Operations

Harmonization of European asylum policy

UNHCR will monitor legal and policy developments in countries in the subregion. The Office will also provide technical advice and support in the transposition of EU laws into national legal frameworks. UNHCR will encourage States not to abandon more generous practices towards refugees as they harmonize national laws with EU asylum directives. UNHCR has also highlighted the need for further burden-sharing efforts between the European Union's Member States, including the relocation of persons in need of international protection.

Ensure access to territory/asylum procedures

UNHCR will continue to focus on access to territory and to asylum procedures for persons arriving in mixed flows. It will boost efforts to ensure that border guards

respect the basic principles of international refugee law. UNHCR is concerned about detention and will do its best to ensure that any detention of asylum-seekers is limited and in compliance with international law. The Office will push for compliance with its guidelines on detention and provide legal assistance to detained asylum-seekers.

In tandem with European States and other countries, UNHCR is exploring ways to deal with arrivals by sea. For instance, the organization participated in a conference on rescue at sea and maritime interceptions in the Mediterranean in Madrid in May 2006. UNHCR is ready and willing to help develop solutions and set up procedures to assist in tackling the asylum-migration nexus in the Mediterranean.

Search for durable solutions

UNHCR will cooperate with national and local authorities and NGOs to highlight the need to help refugees integrate locally. It will also seek to increase the number of resettlement countries in Europe.

Mobilization of political and financial support for refugee protection and assistance and UNHCR's work

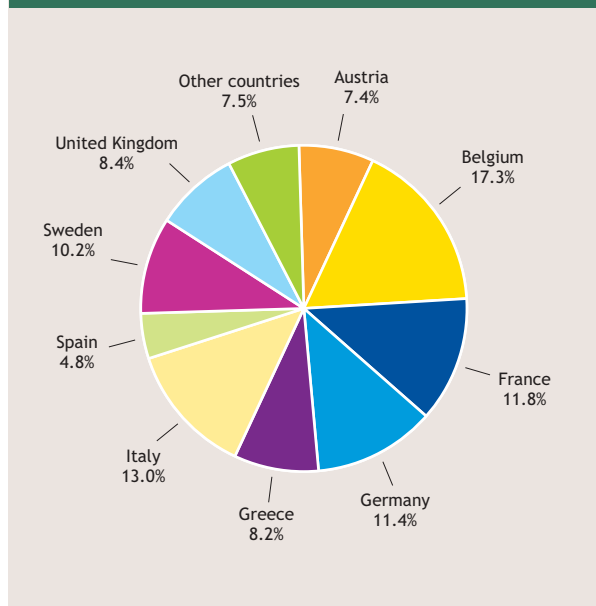
UNHCR aims to keep the political authorities, civil society representatives and the general public informed on refugee issues. Offices in Europe will continue to hold regular media briefings on issues of concern, develop relationships with journalists who follow asylum and refugee issues, liaise with NGO counterparts to identify and develop common strategies, and participate in public events that help promote refugee issues.

Particular attention will also be given to attract more visitors to the national UNHCR websites, which have proven to be widely visited and consulted in Western European countries.

Financial support from Western European governments is needed now more than ever. UNHCR will sustain the interest of its donors by providing them with information about refugee protection and assistance programmes. In selected countries, private sector fund raising will be strengthened.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Austria	1,425,580	903,189
Belgium	3,352,605	3,135,633
France	2,286,391	2,586,052
Germany	2,203,919	2,287,121
Greece	1,589,106	1,055,939
Ireland	640,596	622,061
Italy	2,519,308	2,583,528
Malta	55,235	35,320
Portugal	64,600	51,679
Spain	925,853	978,285
Sweden	1,964,978	1,712,091
Switzerland	694,874	653,170
United Kingdom	1,620,742	1,499,071
Total	19,343,787	18,103,139

2006 Annual Programme Budget by country



2007 Annual Programme Budget by country

