



Western Europe

Major developments

In Western Europe, the downward trend in asylum applications continued in 2005. Overall, the 25 members of the European Union (EU) received 16 per cent fewer asylum claims than in 2004. In the whole of Western Europe there were 14 per cent fewer asylum claims in 2005 than in 2004. France remained the leading asylum destination with an estimated 50,000 asylum claims (a 15 per cent decrease from 2004).

The biggest decrease in asylum claims was in Denmark, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, reaching over 20 per cent. Although the number of claims increased in five countries in Western Europe, only in two countries can this be considered of significance. These were in Malta (a 17 per cent increase from 1,000 to 1,170) and Greece (a 102 per cent increase from 4,470 to 9,050).

The majority of asylum-seekers in the European Union in 2005 were from Serbia and Montenegro, with close to 20,000 applicants (compared to 19,300 applicants in 2004). On the other hand, the number of claims from citizens of the Russian Federation fell by over 30 per cent (from just over 28,000 in 2004 to approximately 19,500 in 2005). Asylum applications from Iraqi citizens rose again in 2005 by almost 30 per cent, from close to 8,200 in 2004 to slightly more than 10,600. Iraqis were the third largest nationality seeking asylum in Europe in 2005. Asylum claims from citizens of both Turkey and China fell by approximately 30 per cent.

There were increases in the number of asylum-seekers from countries such as Colombia (95 per cent), Haiti (50 per cent), Bulgaria (40 per cent), Syria (30 per cent) and Eritrea (30 per cent).

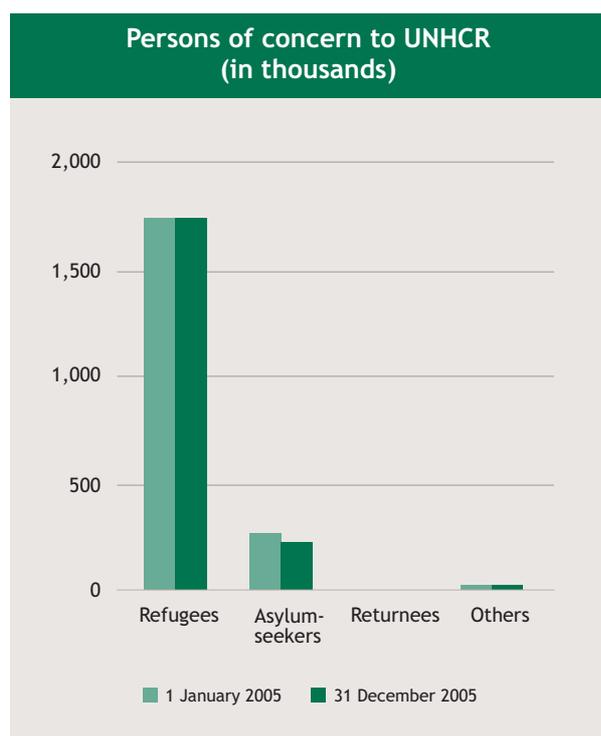
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San Marino
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom



The political environment in Europe continued to prove fairly resistant to attempts to stimulate constructive discussion of asylum and protection issues. Once again, the issues which dominated government thinking on asylum in 2005 were irregular migration and the fight against terrorism, which continued to prompt the perception that increased security precautions were necessary.

Measures to control migration, and mounting doubts in certain quarters about how readily non-Europeans will integrate in European society, also had repercussions on asylum and related issues.

Challenges and concerns



In the Member States of the European Union, the transposition of EU Directives into national law advanced in 2005. UNHCR expressed concern that this process should not result in standards being lowered automatically to the minimum extent possible. Unfortunately, in a number of countries this appears to have happened, as more restrictive legislative and administrative provisions were introduced, even in areas beyond the specific writ of EU legislation. As transposition of the so-called Qualification Directive and the Asylum Procedure Directive continues, UNHCR is concerned that, in practice, violations of the 1951 Convention may occur. These concerns are even more pressing as the EU Directives also influenced legislative processes in non-European Union States.

In addition to monitoring transposition, UNHCR undertook an extensive study of the practical implementation of the Dublin II Regulation. It is of great importance to UNHCR that asylum-seekers who are removed from one EU Member State to another are not subject to indirect *refoulement* due to differences in standards and

requirements between the different countries. Furthermore, a liberal approach should be taken when considering links to the country of asylum, such as those of extended family or previous stays in the country.

UNHCR also advocated for the need for further burden-sharing within the European Union. UNHCR provided support, in particular, to a bilateral responsibility-sharing exercise between Malta and the Netherlands, which led to the transfer of 36 refugees and others recognized to be in need of international protection. Other States also indicated a willingness to engage in a similar exercise with Malta.

Owing in part to the number of deaths linked to irregular movements, there was also an increased focus on mixed flows, particularly via the Mediterranean Sea. In the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the deaths linked to attempted entry by larger groups drew particular attention to the dangers of such movements, as did the approximately 22,000 migrants and asylum-seekers who reached the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2005. More recently, increased numbers of arrivals from Africa were reported in the Canary Islands.

A major concern for UNHCR is that effective access to asylum procedures be ensured and that asylum-seekers

within larger migratory flows be identified promptly and channelled into the asylum system and its related procedures. The Office sought to increase its capacity to monitor borders and provide support where needed, including through partnerships with civil society organizations. An agreement reached in 2005 between the Italian authorities and UNHCR will result in the Office establishing a permanent presence in southern Italy in 2006 through joint cooperation with IOM and the Italian Red Cross. It should be noted that although the spotlight of public debate often threw a lurid light on these dramatic, mainly trans-Mediterranean, journeys, overall they only accounted for a relatively small proportion of those arriving – or staying – in Europe in an irregular manner.

UNHCR continued its advocacy on behalf of people from specific countries of origin on the basis of position papers and guidelines issued, *inter alia*, with respect to people originating from Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro), the Russian Federation (of whom the majority are believed to be Chechens) and Iraq. UNHCR also intervened in a number of court cases where important aspects of an asylum-seeker's claim were at stake.

Other wider protection concerns in a number of countries in Western Europe included considerable variations in refugee recognition rates across countries; insufficient

Budget and expenditure (USD)

Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total
Austria	1,454,171	0	1,454,171	1,250,787	0	1,250,787
Belgium	3,201,193	0	3,201,193	2,878,221	0	2,878,221
France	2,746,206	0	2,746,206	2,540,013	0	2,540,013
Germany	2,081,315	75,000	2,156,315	1,862,762	62,626	1,925,388
Greece	1,574,552	0	1,574,552	1,429,071	0	1,429,071
Ireland	593,029	0	593,029	539,083	0	539,083
Italy	2,188,922	0	2,188,922	1,905,250	0	1,905,250
Malta	43,940	0	43,940	35,234	0	35,234
Portugal	61,371	0	61,371	56,083	0	56,083
Spain	1,420,125	0	1,420,125	1,261,428	0	1,261,428
Sweden	1,925,881	0	1,925,881	1,904,940	0	1,904,940
Switzerland	776,023	0	776,023	735,187	0	735,187
United Kingdom	2,406,941	98,800	2,505,741	1,880,425	36,391	1,916,816
Total	20,473,669	173,800	20,647,469	18,278,484	99,017	18,377,501

¹ The supplementary programme figures apply to the Iraq Operation.

Note: The supplementary programme budget does not include a seven per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.



Spain: A Senior UNHCR official interviewing a group of young Ivorians who arrived in the North African enclave of Melilla in October 2005. UNHCR/ F. Fontanini

effective legal counselling mechanisms for asylum-seekers; inadequate identification, referral and protection mechanisms for those with special needs, including single women and separated children; and inadequate reception conditions.

Progress towards solutions

In 2005, UNHCR continued to cooperate closely with EU institutions, particularly with the European Commission, Council and Parliament. Cooperation and dialogue focused on the internal and external dimensions of EU refugee policy, as well as resource mobilization.

In February 2005, the High Commissioner and the European Commissioner for External Relations signed a strategic partnership agreement regarding protection and assistance to refugees and other people of concern in third countries. This agreement was complemented by a separate exchange of letters with the EC's Directorate General for Justice, Liberty and Security concerning aspects of asylum within the European Union.

With the adoption of the first-phase asylum instruments at the EU level, the focus shifted somewhat from the internal to the external dimension of refugee policy, in particular to improving protection in regions of origin. UNHCR worked closely with the European Union, EU Member States and the regions concerned to elaborate practical proposals.

UNHCR welcomed the decision by several European States, including by some that currently do not provide regular quotas for resettlement, such as the Czech Republic, Germany and Switzerland, to accept Uzbek refugees who were evacuated from Kyrgyzstan. A small group of refugees stranded in Morocco were resettled in Spain and Portugal. The Office engaged in further efforts to encourage more regular resettlement possibilities for refugees worldwide in these and other European countries, while at the same time emphasizing that such efforts should not be a substitute for access to asylum procedures in Europe for spontaneous arrivals.

UNHCR continued to provide support in the negotiation and implementation of tripartite agreements for the

return of Afghan nationals. Such agreements were signed with several European countries. This will provide information and counselling to refugees in the country of asylum regarding the different options for return and the modalities of the transfer and arrival facilities. The agreements relate to voluntary returns, all the while leaving open an option for alternatives to voluntary returns in specified categories of cases. UNHCR also provided some support and advice on a number of return arrangements.

Integration is being increasingly recognized as a considerable challenge in Europe. UNHCR welcomed an increased focus on fostering better integration and noted that a failure of integration also contributed to negative attitudes towards new arrivals. The Office advocated that the specific situation of refugees and others in need of international protection be considered according to legal procedures and from a humanitarian perspective.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in Western Europe continued to concentrate on protection and advocacy, pursuant to its supervisory role under its Statute and Article 35 of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Activities continued to evolve around monitoring and commenting on legislative proposals at both the European Union and national levels. UNHCR also provided significant technical expertise and support to governments in order to continue to improve the overall quality of refugee status decision making.

With a view to enhancing and harmonizing regional strategies among countries in Europe that share common challenges and characteristics, UNHCR's offices are being reconfigured on a subregional basis. In Western Europe, throughout 2005, a series of consultations were held concerning the creation of Regional Representations in Berlin and Rome, with the first changes in structure and staffing at the national and regional levels planned for 2006.

Funding

UNHCR continued to seek to increase the financial support given by European governments as well as the private and corporate sectors. Consistent efforts were made to increase the number of donors to UNHCR. Governmental donors in Western Europe (excluding the European Commission) provided approximately half of all contributions to the Office in 2005.

Partnerships, public awareness and advocacy

In view of the negative public climate with respect to asylum and to refugees more generally, UNHCR pursued its efforts to raise awareness and emphasized the need to fight intolerance and xenophobia in Europe. It also sought to further expand and strengthen its partnerships with key players in the asylum-migration debate and a variety of civil society organizations. Finally, the Office also continued to raise awareness of the specific situation of refugees and of UNHCR's mandate through a variety of information and training activities, as well as symposia organized around specific themes.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget
Western Europe		
	United States	850,000
Sub-total		850,000
Austria		
	Austria	49,199
Sub-total		49,199
Belgium		
	Belgium	68,618
	European Commission	56,209
Sub-total		124,827
France		
	France	856,484
Sub-total		856,484
Germany		
	Germany	345,275
Sub-total		345,275
Ireland		
	Ireland	88,195
Sub-total		88,195
Italy		
	Italy	401,035
Sub-total		401,035
Spain		
	Spain	389,021
Sub-total		389,021
Sweden		
	Russian Federation	87,500
Sub-total		87,500
Switzerland		
	Miscellaneous donors / Private donors in Switzerland	14,200
	Miscellaneous donors / Private donors in the United Arab Emirates	3,800
	Switzerland	100,320
Sub-total		118,320
United Kingdom		
	United Kingdom	451,713
Sub-total		451,713
Total		3,761,568

¹ For more information on the earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.