

Western Europe

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

Iraqi refugees take Swedish language classes in Flen, Sweden



| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- UNHCR contributed its expertise to help shape the Common European Asylum System, or CEAS.
- France, Germany and Switzerland accepted refugees for resettlement, aligning their selection priorities with UNHCR's protection criteria.
- Within the continuing challenge to manage the increase of mixed migration flows in a protection-sensitive manner, UNHCR is regarded as a competent adviser on effective protection. Governments allocated earmarked funds to UNHCR to enhance reception management. In the same context, operational partnerships became increasingly important. UNHCR is concerned about the increasing numbers of unaccompanied and separated children within flows of mixed migration.
- Numerous countries' legislation or operational needs require UNHCR's involvement in asylum procedures. For instance, UNHCR worked with the Greek asylum authorities to address shortcomings in the country's protection regime. The EU's quality initiatives inspired small but important actions for more humane asylum interviews and reception facilities.
- UNHCR offices identified new funding sources while enhancing and maintaining established partnerships. The EU's evolution as UNHCR's second most-important donor continued with a 35 per cent increase in contributions in 2008.



Working environment

Overall, the number of asylum applications in Western Europe increased by some 6 per cent in 2008 over the year before. While there was a drop of 15 per cent in asylum applications in new Member States of the European Union over the same period, there was an average 9 per cent increase in the old Member States.

Some Western European States like Italy, Norway, the Netherlands and Switzerland had to deal with massive increases in the number of applications. Cyprus, Greece and Sweden, which had been major recipients of new asylum-seekers in 2007, saw a considerable decline.

The change in asylum policy in Sweden, especially towards Iraqis in 2008, had immediate repercussions in the Nordic countries, with the number of asylum-seekers sharply rising in Finland and Norway. While the number of individuals requesting refugee status continued to decrease in most of the industrialized countries in 2008, the Nordic countries recorded an increase of about 2 per cent.

Mixed migration flows at the southern borders of Europe continued to grow in 2008. Greece reported 146,000 arrivals of irregular migrants, while Spain saw a decrease in arrivals over the same period, with some 13,000 individuals reaching its shores.

Migration and asylum-related themes continued to be high on the political and media agenda. The Office worked to insert technical and operational expertise into the debate. UNHCR continued to be concerned about reception and detention conditions in southern European States and about the introduction of simplified procedures that might lead to the exclusion of persons in need of international protection.

Achievements and impact

The Office advocated in several multilateral and national forums for the creation of a Common European Asylum System that adheres to the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR followed the transposition of the EU Qualification and Procedures Directives in a number of EU Member States. It signed an exchange of letters with Frontex, including on protection training in the context of border management. The Office collaborated closely with the European Commission, the European Council and European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Court of Justice and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as national counterparts.

The Office continued its effective partnerships with competent national authorities in Spain, Italy and to some degree in Greece and Malta to identify people in need of international protection or with special needs. In the Nordic countries, working relationships with civil society were strengthened through NGOs. The Office called upon states not to return asylum-seekers to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation. Upon invitation, UNHCR organized and chaired a EURASIL meeting on vulnerable persons in the asylum procedure and another session on asylum-seekers from Afghanistan.

France, Switzerland and Germany responded to UNHCR's calls to resettle vulnerable refugees for whom no other solution could be found. They joined the traditional (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), new (Ireland and Portugal), and ad hoc (Italy, Spain) resettlement countries. Malta continued to be the only western European country from where resettlement took place. The Office advocate with European

States for the eventual naturalization of refugees who have no perspectives of return.

Collaboration with the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Court of Human Rights was critical in the quest for international protection. UNHCR obtained additional funding for protection activities in countries outside the EU under budget lines aimed at promoting better governance of migration.

| Constraints |

European States' inclination to control rather than to manage migration and the predominant focus on containment, deterrence and security concerns challenged protection-sensitive handling of migration. Some media and political actors cultivated and encouraged xenophobic tensions in a number of countries.

| Operations |

Austria acceded to the 1954 Statelessness Convention. It also participated in the regional quality initiative on first instance RSD procedures through monitoring of selected asylum interviews based on a comprehensive questionnaire. The backlog of asylum applications did not decrease.

In **Belgium** and **Luxembourg**, 20 participatory focus group discussions with 143 asylum-seekers, refugees and rejected asylum-seekers were held. Luxembourg joined UNHCR's resettlement fact-finding mission to the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan.

In **Denmark**, the decline in the number of new asylum requests that began in 2001 reached its lowest level since 2001 with just 2,380 individuals. However, this has not led to a significant change in public attitudes towards refugees and foreigners in general.

Finland saw an increase of unaccompanied minors within an influx of 4,000 new applicants in the last quarter of 2008. As a consequence, more reception centres had to be established and special housing arrangements were made for separated children.

In **France**, the High Commissioner was the keynote speaker at the French Presidency Conference on Asylum, where he also signed a Framework Agreement that introduced an annual protection resettlement quota. In addition, French officials worked closely with UNHCR to address a variety of challenges in the resettlement of 308 Iraqi refugees. The number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in France increased by half to 226.

In **Germany**, a debate took place concerning the reception of a contingent of Iraqi refugees in accordance with UNHCR's resettlement criteria. The authorities refrained from returning particularly vulnerable asylum-seekers to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation.

Greece recorded the highest number of irregular arrivals in Western Europe. Compared to previous years, there was a large increase of recognitions in the appeals procedure. UNHCR worked closely with relevant authorities to address reception and asylum issues. Subsequent to the publication of its position paper on returns to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation, a UNHCR team worked with the Greek Ministry of the Interior on recommendations to strengthen the asylum system, focusing on institutional arrangements, access to the procedure, eligibility interviews, the use of

qualified interpreters in RSD interviews and case management in the appeals procedure. UNHCR produced a study on unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in Greece which includes recommendations on the identification of people in need of protection.

In **Iceland**, in response to its financial crisis, the Government announced it will not be able to resettle refugees in 2009.

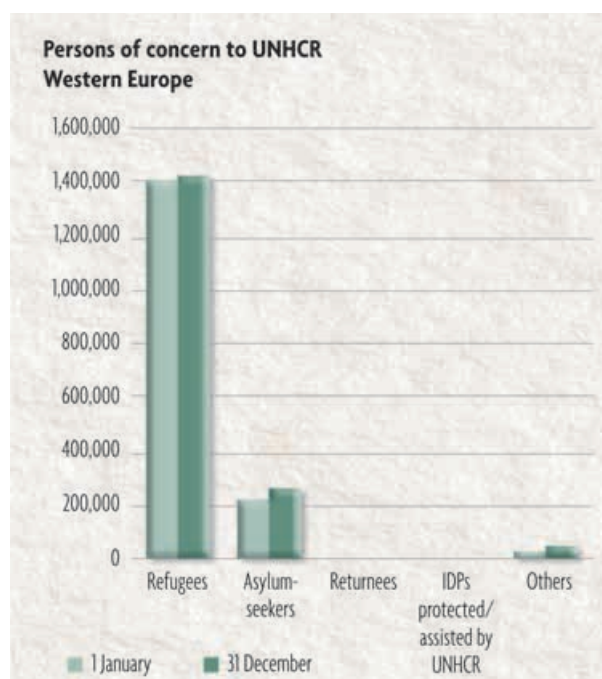
In **Ireland**, the Office supported the revision of the new refugee bill. UNHCR's comments on the Bill were used as a reference tool for NGOs. The Office trained immigration officials on border monitoring, which had a positive impact on both immigration practices and refugee status determination.

In **Italy**, UNHCR's cooperated with reception and asylum authorities as they continued to manage increasing numbers of mixed arrivals and a doubling of asylum claims in 2008. Facilitating the integration of recognized refugees remains a challenge. The Italian Coast Guard continued to play a key role in rescuing people in distress at sea.

In **Malta**, regular coordination meetings with the Ministry of Justice were held to improve the physical conditions in the detention facilities. Malta detains all people arriving in an irregular manner, including asylum-seekers and vulnerable individuals, such as victims of trauma, unaccompanied children, older people or disabled persons. At the end of 2008, the total number of persons of concern to UNHCR stood at some 4,800. UNHCR undertook RSD workshops and fostered partnerships with relevant officials and stakeholders. UNHCR resettled 150 refugees.

Norway recorded a sharp increase of asylum-seekers in 2008. At the end of the year, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration reported nearly 14,500 new applicants. This led Norway to adopt a more restrictive asylum policy. As a result, additional eligibility officers were employed and more reception and accommodation facilities put in place.

In **Portugal**, the newly adopted law on asylum incorporated most of UNHCR's recommendations. UNHCR's partner reported a 300 per cent increase of recognition rates with 82 recognized refugees as well as the arrival of 11 resettled refugees.



Spain saw an important decrease of irregular arrivals. UNHCR commented on the asylum bill and continued to collaborate in the RSD procedure. The Office concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with a national child-protection agency to address the needs of separated children of concern to UNHCR and provided targeted training on child protection on the mainland as well the Canary Islands.

Sweden focused on return of rejected asylum-seekers, mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and Somalia. Often, these returns were not in line with UNHCR guidelines and advice. The Nordic countries, including Sweden, remained major resettlement destinations. In close collaboration with the Office, these countries maintained a flexible policy towards the resettlement of refugees on an emergency basis.

Upon UNHCR's request, **Switzerland** accepted 25 Palestinian and Iraqi refugees for resettlement. UNHCR and its operational partners undertook the first age, gender and diversity workshop to explore good practice such as a study on the integration requirements of Eritreans.

In the **United Kingdom**, despite the continued restrictive protection climate, the Government formally endorsed recommendations made by UNHCR on improving the asylum system, as part of the European Quality Initiative project aimed at promoting a fair and efficient asylum system. The Office made two successful legal interventions at the highest court. UNHCR produced comprehensive comments for the Border Agency in charge of immigration policy, which were positively received by the Home Office and Parliament.

| Financial information |

UNHCR's budgets in Western Europe remain tight, limiting the Office's ability to enhance civil society actors' efficiency. With additional earmarked contributions, some of it prescribed by national law, UNHCR monitored or played an active role in RSD or reception procedures in several countries. In 2008, exchange rate variations had a disproportionate impact on UNHCR budgets in the region.

Budget and expenditure in Western Europe (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Austria	1,013,921	984,353
Belgium	3,907,597	3,805,558
France	2,987,580	2,804,801
Germany	2,666,184	2,467,082
Greece	1,284,717	1,155,893
Ireland	759,115	724,038
Italy	4,090,509	3,914,862
Malta	119,221	112,018
Portugal	88,000	86,036
Spain	1,491,194	1,355,689
Sweden	1,697,734	1,629,789
Switzerland	746,260	675,230
United Kingdom	2,012,374	1,741,902
Total	22,864,404	21,457,249

Note: Excludes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities-mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.

Voluntary contributions to Western Europe (USD)		
Country	Donor	Annual Budget
Austria	Austria	63,864
Austria Subtotal		63,864
Belgium	Belgium	92,014
	European Commission	138,819
	Belgian Lottery	51,020
	Private donors in Belgium	14,126
Belgium Subtotal		295,979
France	France	567,143
France Subtotal		567,143
Germany	Germany	583,090
Germany Subtotal		583,090
Greece	Greece	133,524
Greece Subtotal		133,524
Ireland	Ireland	163,400
Ireland Subtotal		163,400
Italy	Italy	1,747,156
Italy Subtotal		1,747,156
Spain	Spain	699,693
Spain Subtotal		699,693
Sweden	Russian Federation	100,000
Sweden Subtotal		100,000
United Kingdom	United Kingdom	456,175
United Kingdom Subtotal		456,175
Western Europe subregion	United States of America	972,560
Western Europe Overall Subtotal		972,560
Total		5,782,585

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.