

Turkey

Main Objectives

- Support the Government of Turkey's efforts to strengthen and develop its legislative and institutional arrangements for the protection of refugees, in conformity with international standards.
- Co-operate with the Government in joint training programmes, designed to enhance the knowledge and capacities of officials responsible for asylum and refugee matters.
- Advise the Government on the eligibility of individual asylum-seekers from non-European countries and ensure efficient and fair refugee status determination (RSD)
- Promote durable solutions for refugees, mainly through resettlement to third countries, but also through voluntary repatriation and local integration.
- Co-operate with the Government and NGOs in meeting the basic needs of asylum-seekers for material, medical, social and psychological support during their stay in Turkey, with a special emphasis on the needs of refugee women and children.
- Raise public awareness about the problems of asylum-seekers and refugees and build support for Turkey's efforts to protect and assist them.



Planning Figures

Population	Jan. 2003	Dec. 2003
Bosnian and Kosovar Refugees	900	850
Non-European Refugees and Asylum-Seekers	5,000	5,000
Turkish Returnees ¹	2,250	2,450
Total	8,150	8,300

¹ Since 1996.

Total Requirements: USD 5,580,422

Protocol) continues to define and shape refugee protection and UNHCR's role in the country. Due to the geographic limitation, only refugees uprooted by events occurring in Europe are entitled to the rights and protections provided for in the Convention. However, non-European asylum-seekers benefit from a well-functioning system of temporary asylum in Turkey. UNHCR advises the Government regarding the protection needs of non-European asylum-seekers and, because of their temporary stay, works to secure durable solutions for those recognised as refugees, resettling nearly all to third countries.

In March 2001, Turkey made a commitment to lift the geographic limitation in its National Programme for the Adoption of the EU Acquis

Working Environment

Recent Developments

Turkey's decision to maintain the geographic limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention (and its 1967

(NPAA). However, the NPAA recognises that, before taking this step, Turkey needs first to improve existing legislative and institutional arrangements for asylum. To this end, the Government formed an inter-ministerial task force in 2002, to guide implementation of the EU Acquis, including the development of a new law on asylum. UNHCR has offered its expertise and practical support, such as comparative research on asylum systems and study tours for Turkish officials, with special funding made available by a major donor.

UNHCR continues to develop and broaden the reach of its refugee law training programmes, especially for the Ministry of the Interior police officials who regularly handle asylum and refugee matters. UNHCR has intensified collaboration on training with the Gendarmerie General Command, as the border guards of the Gendarmerie are often the first officials encountered by asylum-seekers who enter Turkey. A co-operation agreement aimed at providing structure and continuity for such collaboration was concluded in October 2002. UNHCR has also extended similar training efforts to the Turkish Land Forces and Coast Guard, which share responsibility for border security with the Gendarmerie.

Constraints

The September 11 attacks on the United States caused delays in processing cases for resettlement, as governments grappled with the security implications of these events. With refugees having to wait longer for acceptance and departure to resettlement countries, more assistance had to be provided to meet their basic needs. These unforeseen demands resulted in a serious budgetary shortfall in 2002, compelling UNHCR to reduce monthly allowances; delay payments to some needy refugees; limit medical care and suspend some important programmes altogether. UNHCR could not continue providing support to families for primary education expenses, such as books, supplies, uniforms and shoes for the new school year in September. While the processing of resettlement applications has almost resumed its normal pace, the increased need for assistance is projected to continue during 2003.

The Government's system of temporary asylum affords basic, reliable protection for those non-Europeans who are registered for the RSD proce-

dure. Reported incidents of *refoulement* have declined over the years. Nevertheless, asylum-seekers face some obstacles in gaining access to the procedure. The first challenge is the perilous journey through remote border regions, typically in the company of unscrupulous human smugglers. Once in Turkey, non-European asylum-seekers are required to register their applications within 10 days and provide an identity document within a further 15 days. Roughly 13 per cent of the asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR were unable to lodge their applications with the Government due to these procedural requirements.

Strategy

Protection and Solutions

Turkey is entering a crucial period in the development of its national asylum system. The Government is actively considering new legal and institutional arrangements for the protection and care of refugees. As this work progresses, UNHCR will offer advice and support regarding potential models that Turkey could adopt. The Office will continue to rely on a close working relationship with the Government, developed over years of co-operation on operational protection matters and collaboration on refugee law training and capacity-building.

Implementation of the new legislation will bring a series of new challenges and opportunities to ensure that the new Turkish asylum system incorporates international standards and good practices. UNHCR is contributing towards the eventual creation of a specialised corps of asylum decision-makers and a permanent training capacity on refugee protection within the relevant ministries. In 2003, UNHCR will place greater emphasis on building the capacity of Turkish civil society, including lawyers' associations, universities and NGOs, to play an active role in protecting refugees.

By lifting the geographic limitation to the 1951 Convention and developing its national asylum system, Turkey is setting the stage for UNHCR to eventually reduce its presence and activities in the country. Until this transition occurs, UNHCR will continue to determine the status of non-European



Iraqi refugees in Silopi, Sirkak Province. UNHCR / A. Hollmann

asylum-seekers and pursue durable solutions, mainly through resettlement for those recognised as refugees. With special support from one donor, UNHCR has recruited additional staff and established a special unit to tackle the backlog of pending refugee status applications. The Office aims to reduce the average waiting period between registration and first decision from six months to three months, by the last quarter of 2003. Speeding up the process, without sacrificing the quality of decision-making, will reduce the hardship experienced by refugees and asylum-seekers; it will also reduce protection problems and acts of frustration directed towards UNHCR and its staff. The same donor has also extended support for strengthening UNHCR's capacity to gather and analyse country of origin information and make it accessible to asylum decision-makers.

Most of the remaining European refugees from the Balkan wars of the 1990s are living independently and without assistance from UNHCR. The Office, along with its implementing partner, will work intensively with these refugees to identify and overcome the legal, social and economic barriers they face in achieving durable solutions. Some have opted for local integration in Turkey, and the Government is facilitating the issuance of residence permits. For those who wish to return to their countries of origin, UNHCR and the Government, in co-operation with IOM, are providing repatriation grants and organising their return. UNHCR will also continue to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Turkish refugees from Iraq, working in co-ordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and monitoring the situation of returnees through field missions.

UNHCR places a special emphasis on the protection needs of refugee women and children. All inter-

nal and external training programmes incorporate gender-based persecution, gender-sensitive interviewing techniques and child-sensitive interviewing techniques. UNHCR has developed protocols to guide refugee caseworkers through the legal, social and psychological aspects of rape, domestic violence, divorce and child custody in the Turkish legal context. The protocols will be introduced to UNHCR staff members and NGO and Government partners during 2003.

Assistance

Most non-European refugees and asylum-seekers experience severe economic hardship and social isolation during their stay in Turkey. Following a positive decision on their application for temporary asylum, non-Europeans are assigned to live in one of 25 provincial capitals, known as "satellite cities." They live among the poorer local residents, renting cheaper private accommodation. UNHCR and its partners will seek to alleviate these pressures through social counselling programmes, helping to link refugees and asylum-seekers to existing services and give UNHCR a better understanding of their real needs. The social counselling programme in Van, which has the largest number of asylum-seekers, was suspended in early 2002, when UNHCR's implementing partner was unable to secure government authorisation for the project. A planned expansion of services to Central Anatolia was postponed for the same reason. UNHCR is hopeful that the problems will be resolved by the end of 2002. UNHCR has requested the designation of a government counterpart to facilitate joint planning and the implementation of social services for refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR will extend assistance on the basis of individual assessments of needs. Refugees found to be in need are eligible to receive a monthly subsistence allowance and have access to medical assistance, primary education and, for those at immediate risk, emergency shelter. Due to budgetary constraints, vulnerable asylum-seekers may only receive exceptional, one-off assistance while waiting for a decision on their application for refugee status. UNHCR will provide asylum-seekers with medical assistance in emergency cases, as well as for antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care. The Government, in a welcome

development, issued a circular in March 2002, giving refugees and asylum-seekers free access to State healthcare facilities. This should lead to fewer demands on UNHCR for medical assistance.

Desired Impact

UNHCR seeks to foster the development of a national asylum system which conforms to international standards and delivers protection fairly and efficiently. As the Government and civil society fully assume these responsibilities on a sustainable basis, the Office foresees a gradual reduction of its presence and operational role in Turkey. The more immediate impact of UNHCR's work will lie in ensuring that non-European asylum-seekers have access to temporary asylum procedures and receive speedy and fair consideration of their applications for refugee status. UNHCR also secures durable solutions for refugees through a major resettlement programme, as well as by facilitating small-scale voluntary repatriation both from and to Turkey.

Organisation and Implementation

Management Structure

UNHCR operates from a main office in Ankara and maintains a field presence in Istanbul, Silopi and Van. Seven international, four JPOs and some 60 national staff manage the country programme. One international staff member is responsible for co-ordinating refugee law training in Eastern Europe.

Most of UNHCR's staffing resources are committed to the RSD process and to securing durable solutions through resettlement. With special funding from a major donor, UNHCR's operations in Turkey have been reinforced with eleven temporary national staff for an eighteen-month period from April 2002. Of these, nine eligibility staff and interpreters form a special unit to address the backlog of pending RSD applications.

Co-ordination

UNHCR collaborates with three international NGOs and four national NGOs for social and psychological counselling services and healthcare.

These partners, along with IOM, are also members of UNHCR's Gender and Children Team, which has been established to ensure gender mainstreaming and increase the quality of protection and services offered to refugee women and children.

UNHCR is an active member of the United Nations Country Team in Turkey, and works closely with IOM on refugee resettlement and voluntary repatriation. UNHCR works with UNICEF on issues related to refugee women and children. Upon the request of the UN Resident Co-ordinator, UNHCR will continue to lead the inter-agency working group responsible for emergency preparedness and contingency planning for any possible large-scale refugee influx into Turkey.

Offices
Ankara
Istanbul
Silopi
Van

Partners
NGOs
Anatolian Development Foundation
Association for Solidarity with Asylum-seekers and Migrants
Caritas
Human Resources Development Foundation
International Catholic Migration Commission
Inter-Parish Migration Programme
Turkish Red Crescent Society

Budget (USD)	
Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,449,115
Community Services	155,310
Domestic Needs	823,260
Education	28,000
Food	8,400
Health	267,600
Legal Assistance	299,100
Operational Support (to Agencies)	88,530
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	16,800
Transport / Logistics	40,900
Total Operations	3,177,015
Programme Support	2,403,407
Total	5,580,422