



Western Europe

Recent developments

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

The decline in the number of asylum claims has continued in western Europe. In the first six months of 2005, fewer than 112,000 persons applied for asylum, compared to more than 129,000 over the same period in 2004, a reduction of 13 per cent. Amongst the countries experiencing particularly sharp falls were Austria, Denmark (down by 26 per cent), Germany, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland (down by 29 per cent, 41 per cent, 30 per cent and 44 per cent respectively). However, a number of countries at the external European Union border still faced a sharp increase including Cyprus (up by 26 per cent), Greece (up by 101 per cent) and Malta (up by 103 per cent).

Despite the overall fall, asylum remains a sensitive political issue. Security concerns, particularly following the London bombs in July 2005, have had negative implications for asylum-seekers and refugees.

As part of the transposition of European Union asylum-related directives into national law, the new European Union member States rapidly introduced new legislative proposals which reflect more stringent approaches following accession. Similar tendencies have also been observed in other countries, including Luxembourg and Switzerland. The draft European Union Directive on Asylum Procedures is still awaiting formal



adoption, although its provisions already appear to be taken into account by at least some member States.

The arrival of undocumented migrants on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea has continued to attract the attention of politicians and the public alike. UNHCR has expressed concerns about the number of deaths at sea and welcomed various public and private sector rescue initiatives. Access to the asylum procedure continues to be of particular concern. UNHCR has offered technical support and expertise to deal with the arrivals and to ensure effective identification of asylum-seekers. It also continues to call for more effective burden sharing between European Union member States, including possible reallocation of persons in need of international protection. As well, a more comprehensive strategy is required with transit countries and countries of origin.

Resettlement continues to gain increasing attention. UNHCR welcomed the offer by a number of States (including some non-traditional resettlement States) to accept Uzbek refugees who had been temporarily transferred from Kyrgyzstan to

Romania at the end of July 2005 to ensure their protection. Discussions on the European Union resettlement scheme have also continued, including on common approaches to support regional protection programmes, on which the European Union has issued new instructions.

While integration continues to be seen as a particular challenge, albeit more generally for migrants, UNHCR is highlighting the special needs of refugees and other persons in need of international protection.

Strategic objectives

In line with the UNHCR Strategic Framework (2005-2010) for Europe, an aim will be for States to establish and maintain national asylum systems which are commensurate with international protection standards. At both European and national levels, identifying and adopting policies and measures that could increase the efficiency of national asylum systems, without compromising principles of fairness, will be key. At the same



Switzerland: Asylum-seekers attending computer classes held by an organization that provides legal aid, language and computer classes to asylum-seekers in Geneva. UNHCR / S. Hopper

time, a continuing challenge is to deal with mixed flows and the migration-asylum nexus without limiting access to asylum procedures for *bona fide* asylum-seekers. This includes measures to reinforce the quality of national asylum systems, as well as practical cooperation amongst States with a view to enhancing the coherence of the European Union as a single asylum space. Gender, age and diversity mainstreaming will also need to be prioritized in all aspects of asylum legislation and practice.

The Office will concentrate on ensuring access to the territory followed by effective opportunities to seek asylum, by suggesting appropriate measures to identify asylum-seekers arriving as part of mixed flows, especially at the southern and eastern borders. In view of the continuing mixed flows of illegal migrants and asylum-seekers, particularly across the Mediterranean Sea, UNHCR is examining the question of interception and rescue at sea in collaboration with the concerned States. At the same time, the Office is seeking to develop more comprehensive approaches involving transit countries, particularly in North Africa, and countries of origin.

UNHCR is strongly advocating for the development of systems to share the refugee burden more equitably amongst European Union countries and the creation of a common system for asylum processing that yields fairer and faster asylum decisions.

On a more global level, UNHCR plans to continue to work with the European Union and European States to improve the level of international protection and access to durable solutions elsewhere.

Operations

Harmonization of European asylum policy

UNHCR plans to offer expert advice to governments at European and national levels on policy and legislative changes in line with international norms and best practice, including constructive examples of how national systems could be made more efficient without compromising fairness.

This includes efforts to improve the quality of asylum decision-making, monitoring of borders and border procedures, and efforts to inform and educate the public on asylum issues. UNHCR will also continue to participate in asylum procedures in a number of Western European countries.

With respect to transposition of European Union asylum-related directives, UNHCR firmly hopes that States will not lose sight of the intention of the Directives to set minimum standards only and will not read them as a prescription for convergence towards the lowest common denominator. To support the process, the Office has issued annotated comments on the so-called Qualification Directive and provisional annotated comments to the draft Asylum Procedures Directive, which is still awaiting adoption.

UNHCR also plans to focus on ways to improve practical cooperation between European Union member States in line with the Hague Programme. To support further burden sharing with States experiencing particular challenges in dealing with arrivals of persons in need of international protection, UNHCR is exploring how to provide support for bilateral arrangements between countries.

UNHCR will continue to promote subregional coherence. The progressive reconfiguration of UNHCR's presence around regional offices in Western and Central Europe should support this process.

Public Information, advocacy and partnership

Negative public attitudes toward refugees and institutions of asylum continue to be one of the main challenges for refugee protection and UNHCR's work in Western Europe. UNHCR's public information and advocacy activities will continue to play a key role in creating a more hospitable environment for asylum-seekers and refugees in western Europe. Overcoming negative public attitudes will be a long-term effort requiring the establishment of alliances with governments, NGOs, advocacy groups, academic institutions, corporate sector and other organizations. UNHCR will strive to build strategic, broad-based alliances to promote tolerance and understanding.

Resource mobilization

In view of the shortfall in funding for UNHCR's 2005 Annual Programme, it can be safely predicted that support from Western European governments will be needed more than ever. Almost fifty per cent of UNHCR's 2004 contributions originated from the countries covered in this subregion, with a number agreeing to provide large proportions of their funding completely unearmarked. This welcome trend towards more flexible support from the key donor countries has continued in 2005. Thus, when budget caps have to be applied and activities postponed or indefinitely suspended, flexible contributions leave UNHCR in a better position to reset its priorities. The Office has already received encouraging indications from key donors that in 2006 an even greater proportion of donations will be unearmarked, in the spirit of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme Budget
Austria	1,425,580
Belgium	3,352,605
France	2,286,391
Germany	2,203,919
Greece	1,589,106
Ireland	640,596
Italy	2,519,308
Malta	55,235
Portugal	64,600
Spain	925,853
Sweden	1,964,978
Switzerland	694,874
United Kingdom	1,620,742
Total	19,343,787

Western Europe