



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

Operational highlights

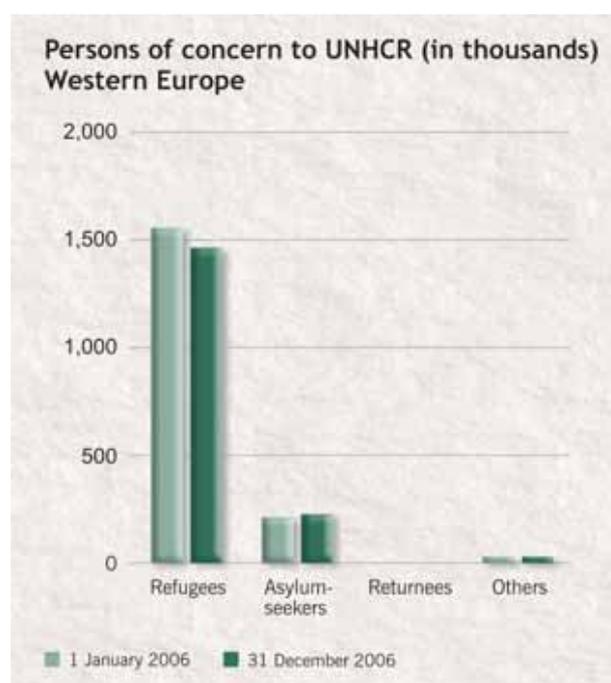
- UNHCR continued to work closely with the European Commission (EC), national authorities and NGOs to support the transposition of the main European Union (EU) asylum directives, in particular, those linked to asylum procedures and qualification. Along these lines, UNHCR presented the German Presidency to the EU with a policy paper outlining its views on the formation of a common asylum policy across Europe. In addition, UNHCR contributed substantively to the debate on the Dublin II Regulation, which aims to determine responsibility among Member States for examining asylum claims.
- The development of UNHCR's Ten-Point Plan of Action for Addressing Mixed Migratory Movements has provided a framework for the Office's efforts to address the problem of mixed migration flows into Europe. This includes the strengthening of UNHCR's operational partnership with governments, NGOs and other civil society entities.
- UNHCR has worked in particular with the Governments of Spain, Italy, Malta and Greece to establish tools and procedures to address the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated children, as well as to build national capacities to counter and prevent sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the reception of migrants arriving by sea.



Working environment

The number of asylum-seekers arriving in Europe in 2006 continued to decline significantly compared to previous years. For example, the United Kingdom witnessed a 10 per cent decrease; Germany a 27 per cent decrease; and Austria and Finland a decrease of 41 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. France remained the leading asylum destination with some 30,000 asylum claims but, nonetheless, witnessed a decrease of 38 per cent as compared to 2005. In Switzerland, the total number of persons in the asylum procedure (including rejected cases) stood at more than 68,100, a slight decrease compared to 2005 (approximately 71,900). The significant drop in applications across Europe can partially be explained by more restrictive border control mechanisms established in the majority of Western European countries in response to mixed migration flows. At the same time, in the Mediterranean rim, Spain, Italy, Malta and, to a lesser extent Greece, continued to receive irregular arrivals of migrants by sea, mostly from North Africa and sub-Saharan African countries. In Sweden, there was a 39 per cent increase in asylum applications, with over 24,300 applications at the end of 2006 (third highest in Western Europe), representing the largest upsurge amongst all Western European countries. This was due to almost 9,000 asylum applications from Iraqi nationals in 2006.

With regard to the countries of origin of asylum-seekers arriving in the European Union, 2006 showed a similar trend to the previous year. There were approximately 20,000 asylum applications from Iraqis: an 80 per cent increase since 2005; and 13,000 asylum applications from the Russian Federation (mainly from Chechnya), the second highest country of origin, despite a 31 per cent decrease compared to the previous year. Other significant asylum-seeker arrivals were registered from



Serbia (mainly from Kosovo), Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan.

In the Mediterranean region, there was a significant rise in the number of undocumented migrants who arrived by sea, some possibly in need of international protection, accompanied by a considerable number of lives lost at sea near Lampedusa, Malta and the Canary Islands. Mixed migration flows are a driving factor in the asylum debate around the Mediterranean rim. UNHCR is concerned that more restrictive border controls might compromise fair access to the asylum procedure.

Achievements and impact

UNHCR continued to offer its technical expertise regarding the transposition of European Union directives into national legislation and made concrete proposals to overcome procedural gaps and improve reception standards. UNHCR has also been in a dialogue with a number of States to increase the number of resettlement countries in Europe. Furthermore, UNHCR offered its assistance through training and technical advice so that border guards throughout Western Europe respect the basic principles of international refugee law. UNHCR maintains that all Western European States should limit the use of detention, particularly when minors are involved, and that any measures taken comply with legislation and norms.

UNHCR strengthened its relations with the new European Union agency FRONTEX and worked closely on common priorities relating to interception and reception issues. The Office's aim is to ensure that people in need of international protection are granted access both to territory and to asylum procedures.

UNHCR aimed to promote age and gender sensitivity in asylum and decision-making procedures. The age, gender and diversity mainstreaming process, in partnership with governmental authorities and NGOs, has been part of that effort. In cooperation with national governments, UNHCR focused on programmes designed to improve the quality of asylum procedures. A positive example is the "Quality Initiative", introduced in the United Kingdom and Austria, which included the monitoring of procedures and the application of refugee criteria.

Constraints

Significant variations in refugee recognition rates across countries, particularly in respect of Iraqi nationals, are of a growing concern to the Office. Cases of insufficient legal counselling mechanisms for asylum-seekers; inadequate identification, referral and protection

mechanisms for those with special needs, including separated children, were noted as well as inadequate reception and detention conditions. UNHCR worked with policy makers and key interlocutors to highlight these issues. Asylum-seekers face serious difficulties in registering an appeal if their asylum request is rejected in the first instance.

Additionally, integration is being more and more recognized as a considerable challenge in Europe. UNHCR has welcomed an increased focus on fostering better refugee integration and noted that failure to integrate refugees also contributes to negative attitudes towards new arrivals. The Office is therefore encouraging solutions which will allow for the social inclusion of asylum-seekers, including assistance in language and vocational training, early access to the labour market and the enrolment of children in schools.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in Western Europe pursued the objectives of improving the quality of asylum in an enlarging European Union through the promotion of a harmonised refugee protection regime in conformity with international protection standards. Increased support for refugees was sought through the promotion of access to territories and asylum procedures for persons in need of international protection. In addition, UNHCR aimed to gain public support and understanding for refugees in their efforts to find durable solutions.

An agreement reached in 2005 between the Italian authorities and UNHCR resulted in the Office establishing a permanent presence in southern Italy in 2006 through cooperation with its partners. The Lampedusa project will continue in 2007-2008 and will include additional activities such as the creation of a mobile team capable of being present at any point on the Sicilian coast where arrivals might take place. The project will also improve the systematic collection, analysis and exchange of data on migratory movements into Italy through fact-finding missions to Libya and other countries in North Africa. UNHCR commended the Government of Spain's attempts to monitor, through regular missions to main entry points, the impact of migration control measures on asylum-seekers. The Office also continued to cooperate with the Spanish officials in the exercise of means to ensure that asylum claims are handled in an appropriate manner.

The Office monitored and submitted interventions in precedent-setting cases before national and regional courts, as appropriate. UNHCR worked particularly through the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, to promote understanding of and respect for international standards and best practice.



UNHCR/Vikström

Iraqi refugees at the Swedish Migration Board in Flen.

Partnerships play a strong role in UNHCR's strategies in Western Europe, and the Office has strengthened its policy of developing critical linkages, involving governments, regional bodies and organizations as well as NGOs. Through interactions with these entities, UNHCR has provided input into States' practices and policies regarding refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly with regard to the harmonization and transposition of European Union directives, returns and readmission policies.

In view of negative public attitudes with respect to asylum and towards refugees in general, UNHCR pursued its efforts to raise public awareness and emphasized the need to fight intolerance and xenophobia in Europe through media briefings, press releases and the development of positive relations with journalists. UNHCR continued to raise awareness concerning its mandate and the situation of refugees worldwide, through a variety of information and training activities.

UNHCR offices in Europe play an important role in raising funds for the organization. In this respect, the office in Brussels maintained constant contact with

European Commission and institutions to present and follow up on funding submissions. Public and private sector fund raising activities were successfully carried out in Spain, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway.

UNHCR continued its regionalization process with a strategy to develop regional offices covering countries with common challenges and characteristics. The Regional Office in Berlin (Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic) was established in late 2005 and consolidated in 2006. The Regional Office in Rome was further consolidated, and the Regional Office in Brussels maintained its dual role of policy and fund raising support to the EU Institutions and covered Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

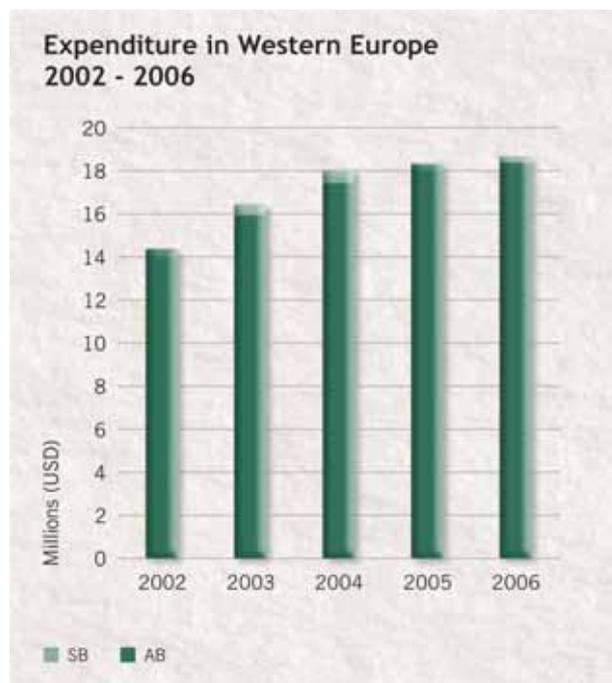
Financial information

Western Europe shows the lowest percentage of earmarked contributions within Europe. With the 20 per cent capping of budgets worldwide at the beginning of 2006, activities in the region were significantly affected.

This resulted in a cut to legal assistance, public information, awareness and promotional activities and support to NGO networks.

On a more positive note, France, Spain, the United Kingdom and Italy provided UNHCR with earmarked contributions for the Office's involvement in refugee status determination-related activities in these countries. In addition, over ten Western European Governments provided UNHCR with resources to cover administrative costs, including staffing and the provision of office premises, for the UNHCR representations in their countries.

UNHCR's expenditures in Western Europe have increased slightly from over 14 million USD in 2002 to more than 18 million USD in 2006. The increase in expenditures is related to an increase in earmarked contributions that permitted UNHCR to expand its protection activities in Western Europe.



Budget and expenditure (USD)

Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	AB	SB ¹	Total	AB	SB	Total
Austria	1,337,258	0	1,337,258	1,117,032	0	1,117,032
Belgium	4,286,546	0	4,286,546	3,298,065	0	3,298,065
France	3,166,716	0	3,166,716	2,428,873	0	2,428,873
Germany	2,524,672	82,628	2,607,300	1,964,225	82,628	2,046,853
Greece	1,636,805	0	1,636,805	1,337,011	0	1,337,011
Ireland	794,028	0	794,028	594,206	0	594,206
Italy	3,428,332	0	3,428,332	2,799,844	0	2,799,844
Malta	37,994	0	37,994	21,731	0	21,731
Portugal	49,289	0	49,289	43,300	0	43,300
Spain	1,565,636	0	1,565,636	1,212,869	0	1,212,869
Sweden	2,387,079	0	2,387,079	1,739,235	0	1,739,235
Switzerland	574,809	0	574,809	508,637	0	508,637
United Kingdom	1,956,649	188,818	2,145,467	1,344,059	188,818	1,532,877
Total	23,745,813	271,446	24,017,259	18,409,087	271,446	18,680,533

¹ Does not include a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)

Earmarking	Donor	AB
Austria		
	Austria	52,247
Sub-total		52,247
Belgium		
	Belgium	146,767
	European Commission	75,414
	Netherlands	26,602
Sub-total		248,783

Earmarking	Donor	AB
France		
	France	527,623
Sub-total		527,623
Germany		
	Germany	483,676
Sub-total		483,676
Ireland		
	Ireland	83,204
Sub-total		83,204
Italy		
	Italy	516,870
Sub-total		516,870
Spain		
	Spain	371,217
Sub-total		371,217
Sweden		
	Russian Federation	120,000
Sub-total		120,000
Switzerland		
	Switzerland	75,000
Sub-total		75,000
United Kingdom		
	United Kingdom	427,744
Sub-total		427,744
Total		2,906,364