

An asylum-seeker and her child receive medical assistance at a Fedasil asylum centre in Belgium.

Albania
Andorra
Austria
Belgium
Cyprus
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Holy See
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Monaco
Netherlands
Norway
Portugal
San Marino
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland



Northern, Western and Southern Europe

| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- UNHCR worked closely with European Governments to ensure that persons fleeing events in North Africa and seeking protection had access to asylum procedures, particularly in Italy and Malta, where many of those rescued at sea in the Mediterranean disembarked. In addition to those received within European State borders, resettlement places for some 1,370 refugees in North Africa were identified in 10 European countries.
- Greece received strong support from UNHCR in its bid to reform its asylum system. The task was challenging in light of the economic crisis in the country. With important court decisions pointing to the vulnerability of asylum-seekers, notably under the Dublin regulations,

UNHCR stepped up efforts to support capacity-building, solidarity and responsibility-sharing among States in the region. This included the relocation within the EU of 230 refugees from Malta in 2011 as part of the EUREMA I project.

- UNHCR continued to help strengthen the quality of national asylum systems. The conclusions of the Further Developing Quality project, which was funded by the European Union (EU) and involved 12 EU Member States, were presented to Governments and others at a conference in Brussels in September. UNHCR also completed a project to improve the quality of the asylum system in Sweden.



- As part of the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, UNHCR intensified work with governments on the issue. Research on statelessness was published in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and a seminar promoting statelessness procedures in Brussels in July saw the participation of representatives from several European Governments. Both Belgium and Luxembourg have pledged to ratify the 1961 Convention.
- UNHCR found new ways of helping unaccompanied and separated children, and began a project in 2011 to identify and assist 550 such children on the move in Greece, Italy and France through outreach activities and drop-in centres.
- The launch of the second phase of a joint resettlement project with IOM and ICMC aimed at building local capacity for the reception and integration of refugees. Seventeen countries participated and shared their experiences, knowledge and expertise on resettlement. An important development in this regard was Germany's announcement of a new annual resettlement quota of 300 places.

Working environment

Countries in this subregion continued to receive the vast majority of asylum claims in Europe. The overall number of applications in 2011 was slightly higher than in 2010. While there has been a decline in the number of applications in some countries, others, such as the Baltic States, have seen significant increases.

While a relatively modest proportion of all the people fleeing North Africa came to Europe, the largest rise recorded in 2011 related to arrivals from Tunisia and Libya. Southern Europe saw the largest relative increase driven by

the events in North Africa, receiving nearly 67,000 asylum requests in 2011, or 87 per cent more than in 2010. During 2011, a shift was noted from arrivals predominantly at sea borders to increasing numbers at the land border between Turkey and Greece, in the region of Evros.

The economic crisis which hit some European countries particularly hard put pressure on governments to minimize asylum costs. Budget cuts reduced already limited resources for legal aid, reception conditions, support for vulnerable asylum-seekers and integration. Concerns about the economic crisis and developments in North Africa and the Middle East also affected debates on migration in many countries. The persistence of anti-immigration sentiments reduced political will to maintain or improve asylum space.

There has been a decline from years past in the number of people entering Europe by irregular means, including through smuggling or trafficking, yet public discourse often made little distinction between asylum-seekers and irregular migrants without protection needs. Stricter border control and migration management by States in the region can affect access to territory and asylum procedures for persons in need of international protection.

UNHCR worked closely with government counterparts and a wide range of partners at both national and European levels. Strong links with national NGOs were maintained in all countries, while ties with OSCE have helped UNHCR to focus on hate-crime reporting and monitoring and responses to victims of trafficking, among other issues. In addition to well-established liaison with the Council of Europe on human rights issues for asylum-seekers and refugees, UNHCR also cooperated with the Council's institutions to increase awareness of integration and durable solutions.

The EU's commitment to establish a Common European Asylum System has been a key driver of asylum policy in the region. In this regard, the Court of Justice of the EU is gaining increasing importance in the interpretation of regional

refugee law, as is the European Court of Human Rights, which produced a number of key decisions in 2011 on asylum matters.

In addition to its engagement with the courts, UNHCR has worked closely with institutions of the European Union, as well as specialized agencies, such as the European Asylum Support Office, the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the EU Member States (FRONTEX) and the Fundamental Rights Agency. The overall aim has been to promote UNHCR's protection objectives and respect for international and European law on asylum.

While significant differences persisted in recognition rates for asylum-seekers among European countries, there was acceptance of the need to ensure consistency and quality in standards of treatment in order to ensure the viability of a Common European Asylum System. Reception conditions continued to cause concern in some countries, with many asylum-seekers homeless or destitute. In addition, the increased use of detention, sometimes in inappropriate conditions and on grounds not regulated by law, required further attention.

Achievements and impact

Throughout 2011, UNHCR sought to ensure access to territory and asylum procedures, resettlement in European countries and integration of beneficiaries of international protection.

Building support for refugee protection

UNHCR's offices in Europe capitalized on the commemorations of the Refugee and Statelessness Conventions during the year, to highlight the particular situation of asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless persons and others of concern. In addition to rolling out globally the "I" Campaign, UNHCR in Europe portrayed 60 years of refugee protection through the life stories of 60 refugees in Europe since 1951. Awareness of refugee issues was promoted in all capitals through World Refugee Day. Projects specifically

aimed at countering prejudice and racism were implemented in Greece and Italy.

Stateless persons were also the focus of awareness-raising actions. Discussions and analytical reports targeted policy-makers, while public events were held in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Spain to demonstrate the impact of statelessness on peoples' lives.

Access to territory and the quality of asylum systems

Access to territory via land and sea borders remained an issue of major concern to UNHCR. Following the arrival of some 56,000 people from North Africa, mostly in Italy, UNHCR worked closely with governments to identify those in need of protection. In Italy, UNHCR strengthened its presence in locations with new arrivals and participated in the additional eligibility commissions established to respond to the surge in arrivals from North Africa. UNHCR also engaged new partners to campaign for timely rescue at sea, but despite these efforts, an estimated 2,000 people lost their lives seeking to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

UNHCR continued its liaison work with FRONTEX, monitoring joint operations and conducting operational visits to selected airports across the EU. Access to European territory at land borders was part of UNHCR's focus in the Baltic countries, where border monitoring agreements were put in place with partners in Lithuania and Latvia.

UNHCR engaged with European institutions and national authorities to strengthen the legal and practical protection framework. As part of these efforts, UNHCR conducted a comparative study of the application of Article 15c of the EU Qualification Directive relating to persons fleeing indiscriminate violence in armed conflict. The final report, *Safe at Last? Law and Practice in Selected EU Member States with Respect to Asylum-Seekers Fleeing Indiscriminate Violence*, was widely acknowledged by States and other stakeholders.

Budget and expenditure in Northern, Western and Southern Europe | USD

Country		PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 2 Stateless programme	Total
Belgium Regional Office ¹	Budget	12,354,702	1,306,944	13,661,646
	Expenditure	11,067,994	1,264,087	12,332,081
Italy Regional Office ²	Budget	18,920,412	81,473	19,001,885
	Expenditure	13,873,225	71,144	13,944,369
Spain	Budget	1,384,762	234,190	1,618,952
	Expenditure	1,203,065	196,171	1,399,236
Sweden Regional Office ³	Budget	2,308,975	469,541	2,778,516
	Expenditure	1,693,123	332,643	2,025,766
Regional Activities	Budget	3,735,563	0	3,735,563
	Expenditure	2,168,429	0	2,168,429
Total budget		38,704,414	2,092,148	40,796,562
Total expenditure		30,005,836	1,864,045	31,869,881

¹ Includes activities in Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the Liaison Office in Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

² Includes activities in Albania, Cyprus, Greece, and Malta.

³ Includes activities in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway.

UNHCR also increased its support for the development of protection standards through engagement with the competent courts. Two judgments in cases where UNHCR had intervened as a third party—*MSS vs. Belgium and Greece* before the European Court of Human Rights and *NS and ME* before the Court of Justice of the EU—had a particular impact on some aspects of the Common European Asylum System and the Dublin Regulation in particular.

With financial support from the European Union and the European Economic Area, UNHCR assisted in the development of the Greek asylum system and the implementation of asylum procedures under new legislation. UNHCR contributed significantly to the implementation of the Greek Action Plan on Migration Management and Asylum Reform by deploying staff to support the first instance of the asylum procedure. It also participated in appeal committees, provided country of origin information and trained interviewers and decision makers. These efforts have led to notable improvement in the quality of the asylum procedure, but significant challenges remained.

UNHCR also supported programmes to improve the quality of asylum systems in the United Kingdom, Austria and Sweden. In Germany, it assisted the authorities in the adjudication of claims from survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR also successfully concluded a project, *Further Developing Quality*, involving asylum procedures in Central European countries, as well as Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom. The outputs of the project will be used in future quality-assurance work. UNHCR also remained engaged in the asylum procedure in Austria, Spain, Italy and France.

Reception conditions for asylum-seekers continued to be of concern. Alternatives to detention were promoted in Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. UNHCR also advocated for adequate reception standards in France, Belgium and Luxembourg, where an increase in applications has opened up significant gaps.

Capacity-building measures in 12 countries strengthened specific protection areas covering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, as well as vulnerable

women, victims of trafficking, and unaccompanied and separated children. UNHCR helped the NGO-led projects, *Fleeing Homophobia* and *Gender-Sensitive Asylum Procedures*.

• Durable solutions

Considerable work was done to promote a stronger European role in global resettlement efforts. The second joint ICMC/IOM/UNHCR resettlement project, funded by the European Refugee Fund (ERF), helped 17 countries to build resettlement reception and integration capacity through stakeholder meetings, training, information-sharing and other activities. The announcement by Germany of an annual resettlement quota of 300 places represented a significant development.

Strong efforts to ensure resettlement from North Africa resulted in some 570 refugees departing for European countries, with some 800 additional places being pledged. UNHCR also supported European efforts to relocate 230 people in need of protection from Malta as part of the EUREMA I project.

To emphasize the importance of refugees' integration, UNHCR provided input at EU and national legislative and policy discussions, and worked on integration strategies in several countries. These included a project in Malta aimed at the local integration of women and separated children. In Estonia, UNHCR implemented two ERF-funded projects with IOM: one focused on teachers and schoolchildren, the other on journalists and student journalists. Throughout the region, selected cases received support for family reunification.

| Constraints |

Economic difficulties in many countries, unemployment and a sense of general insecurity had a negative effect on public attitudes towards migrants and refugees. Budget cuts in the asylum area affected reception standards and integration programmes for refugees, and there was little political will to fill protection gaps in asylum systems. Hardening attitudes towards irregular entry and the enforcement of stricter border control measures affected refugees who resorted to irregular means to reach safety in Europe. Strong leadership to combat negative attitudes was still largely absent.

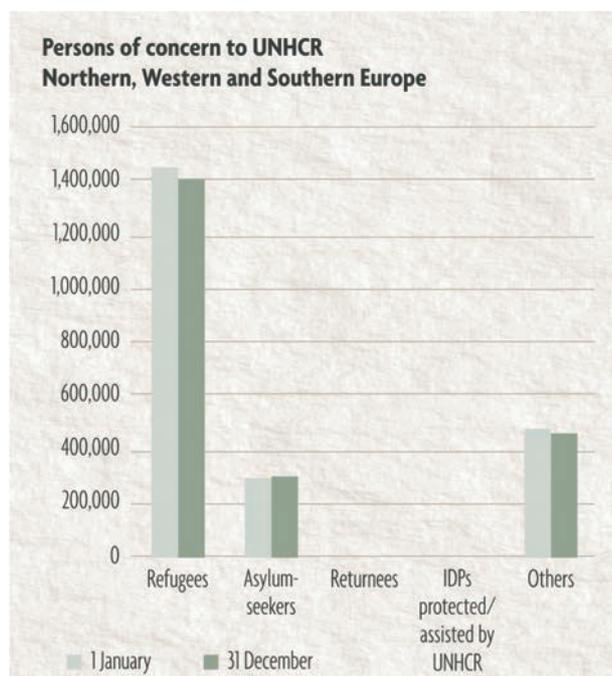
Increasingly, detention was being used as a deterrent both at entry points prior to transfers, or before return, sometimes in inappropriate conditions and on grounds not regulated by law.

Significant differences in practice and quality among asylum systems have led to secondary movements. In some countries, protection gaps challenged the legitimacy of the Dublin Regulation. In the absence of wider legal migration channels, asylum systems were also accessed for irregular migration. Measures to deal with situations of particular pressures and sudden increases in applications therefore need to include safeguards ensuring access to protection for those in need.

| Operations |

In **Albania**, UNHCR provided legal advice and assistance to some 100 refugees and asylum-seekers.

In **Austria**, UNHCR provided legal analysis that paved the way for changes to national legislation on the prevention of



statelessness. Discussions with interlocutors led to the identification of new areas for research on integration.

UNHCR helped to build the capacity of national asylum authorities in the **Baltic States** and assist them to establish mechanisms to identify asylum-seekers with specific needs. In **Estonia**, UNHCR focused on the provision of legal aid to asylum-seekers and ensuring access to the territory. In **Latvia**, UNHCR and the State Border Guards signed an agreement on border monitoring. UNHCR endeavoured to address statelessness in the region through recommendations on national legislation and awareness-raising in local media.

In **Belgium**, UNHCR worked closely with partners on a statelessness study. In a welcome move, the new Government agreed to ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and to introduce a statelessness procedure. UNHCR engaged with the authorities to address an increase in the number of asylum applications and an ongoing reception crisis. Particular attention was devoted to promoting alternatives to detention and strengthening the quality of asylum decisions.

The situation remained stable in **Cyprus**, where UNHCR had prepared for possible arrivals from Syria. UNHCR's priorities here were to monitor access to territory and ensure the release from detention and stay of deportation of asylum-seekers from the north of Cyprus. UNHCR also helped to provide assistance to meet basic needs.

In **Italy**, UNHCR's participation in eligibility commissions has contributed to improving standards in asylum decision-making. The presence of UNHCR, IOM and NGOs under the *Praesidium* project at sea entry points and the deployments in response to the North Africa emergency have helped ensure access to territory and procedures for asylum-seekers.

UNHCR in **France** engaged in new ways to support unaccompanied and separated children in Calais. It also worked successfully with the courts to ensure that measures to cope with large numbers of applications had sufficient safeguards.

In **Germany**, UNHCR worked closely with the authorities on asylum adjudication, in particular in relation to SGBV. UNHCR also engaged in court proceedings, providing advice in several key cases. Refugee youth were given a voice through a project in which they produced a film about their experiences. Dialogue with refugee women occurred through a government-led working group, and special measures were adopted for the recognition of the professional and educational attainments of refugees.

UNHCR was present in the border areas of **Greece** to monitor the arrival of people of concern in mixed population flows, facilitate access to procedures for asylum-seekers, and ensure that vulnerable cases received the appropriate referrals.

In **Ireland**, UNHCR used the multimedia material of "The 1" campaign to increase public awareness of refugees, leading to significant new progress in outreach. Work to ensure the quality of the asylum system and improve access to subsidiary protection continued.

In **Luxembourg**, UNHCR engaged with the authorities to deal with a considerable increase in asylum applications. UNHCR's advocacy efforts also yielded a commitment from

the Government to ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

In **Malta**, UNHCR focused on facilitating local integration and supporting relocation and resettlement; both activities received earmarked funding from the Maltese Government. The detention policy, however, remained of concern.

UNHCR in the **Netherlands** launched a study on statelessness to raise awareness of this largely unreported problem. Work to draw attention to the specific needs of refugees in integration and family reunification also continued. Despite a difficult political climate, the Netherlands resettlement programme continued to provide an important contribution to protection in Europe.

Work in the **Nordic countries** (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) focused on awareness-raising, cooperation on the global agenda and supporting quality in asylum systems. As such, important contributions were made through the quality initiative in **Sweden**. In **Finland**, UNHCR and the Government engaged refugee women in dialogue about their experiences and needs. In **Norway**, UNHCR ensured high-level engagement in discussing climate change and displacement and worked to profile the Nansen Award. In all the Nordic countries, awareness of the situation of refugees was raised with youth through the online game *Against all Odds*.

In **Portugal**, reception conditions and integration activities continued to be of a high standard, notwithstanding an increase in asylum applications and the economic crisis. The quota of 30 resettlement places was filled in 2011, bringing to 137 the number of refugees resettled in Portugal to date.

In **Spain**, advocacy efforts revolved around protection safeguards in migration control, the prevention of *refoulement* and fairness and quality of the asylum procedure. A Guide for Lawyers assisting asylum-seekers was developed jointly with the Madrid Bar Association. Training was conducted on the jurisprudence and on the procedural avenues available before the European Court of Human Rights to prevent *refoulement* (Rule 39). Working with Spain's Ombudsman and the Spanish Network Against Trafficking, UNHCR secured changes in the law on aliens, notably the establishment of legal remedies for victims of trafficking.

In **Switzerland** and **Liechtenstein**, UNHCR engaged in new ways to ensure the integration of refugees. It also advocated successfully for resettlement on family grounds for persons from North Africa.

UNHCR in the **United Kingdom** continued its important work on quality with the UK Border Agency. It also worked in partnership with the NGO AsylumAid to map the situation of stateless persons. Discussions with the authorities on a statelessness determination procedure have begun, and work through the courts to improve protection standards continued.

Financial information

The overall 2011 budget for this subregion remained fairly similar to that for 2010. The largest share of the budget went to Southern Europe, including Greece.

Voluntary contributions to Northern, Western and Southern Europe | USD

Earmarking / Donor	PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	All pillars	Total
NORTHERN, WESTERN AND SOUTHERN EUROPE SUBREGION			
United States of America		2,701,000	2,701,000
Northern, Western and Southern Europe subtotal	0	2,701,000	2,701,000
BELGIUM REGIONAL OFFICE			
Austria	173,626		173,626
Belgium	87,669		87,669
France	875,955		875,955
Germany		525,624	525,624
Ireland	26,667		26,667
United Kingdom	295,525		295,525
Belgium Regional Office subtotal	1,459,441	525,624	1,985,065
ITALY REGIONAL OFFICE			
European Union	997,724		997,724
Greece	2,075,873		2,075,873
International Organization for Migration	9,461		9,461
Italy	2,411,368		2,411,368
Malta	79,082		79,082
United Kingdom	368,056		368,056
Italy Regional Office subtotal	5,941,564	0	5,941,564
SPAIN			
Spain	582,865		582,865
Spain subtotal	582,865	0	582,865
SWEDEN REGIONAL OFFICE			
Russian Federation		300,000	300,000
Sweden	29,901		29,901
Sweden Regional Office subtotal	29,901	300,000	329,901
REGIONAL ACTIVITIES			
European Union	539,481		539,481
International Organization for Migration	35,480		35,480
Private donors in the Netherlands	27,049		27,049
Private donors in the United Kingdom	143,081		143,081
Regional activities subtotal	745,090	0	745,090
Total	8,758,861	3,526,624	12,285,485