WORKING ENVIRONMENT

An unprecedented refugee crisis in Europe unfolded in 2015 as an increasing number of people risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea in search of safety and protection.

More than 1 million people arrived in Southern Europe by boat during the year, with 84 per cent from the world's top 10 refugee-producing countries including Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria). The majority of the new arrivals – at least 850,000 people – crossed the Aegean Sea from Turkey and arrived in Greece. During the year, some 3,770 people died or were reported missing in the Mediterranean Sea. Children made up 31 per cent of total arrivals; many are unaccompanied or separated and require particular care and attention.

The impact of the crisis was felt across the continent due to the significant onward movement from Greece to countries in Western and Northern Europe through the Western Balkans route. Refugees dominated the region's news and political agenda in 2015 and the crisis severely tested the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Existing frameworks were unable to facilitate the management of the crisis or preserve the protection space in a sustainable manner, which placed Europe's asylum system in jeopardy.

UNHCR/Rafal Kostrzynski

Refugee children at a border point between Croatia and Hungary.

Europe

Faced with domestic pressure, numerous European countries responded to the crisis by unilaterally imposing greater restrictions on access to their territories, both legal and physical. Many countries along the Western Balkans route passed legislation that placed increased limitations on the ability of various refugee groups to access asylum systems. Furthermore, 2015 saw walls and fences erected along borders between several countries in an effort to thwart the movement of refugees into their countries and across Europe.

Xenophobia and intolerance continued to mark the public discourse in many countries in Europe, leading to discrimination and, at times, violence, increasing pressure on European governments to further impose restrictive legislation, such as on family reunification, and limitations on access to national asylum systems. UNHCR remained particularly concerned by States violating their legal obligations towards refugees and asylum-seekers, which resulted in large numbers of people forcibly returned, across border points, outside of legal channels.

More than 2 million asylum applications were lodged in 38 European countries in 2015 – almost three times the number in 2014 (709,757). It should be noted, however, that the recording of statistical information in Europe in 2015 includes some instances of double counting. According to European government statistics, the main countries of origin of applicants were Syria (675,668), Afghanistan (406,300) and Iraq (253,558). European Union (EU) Member States received more than 1.2 million asylum applications, with Germany and Sweden receiving close to 50 per cent of applications launched in the EU.
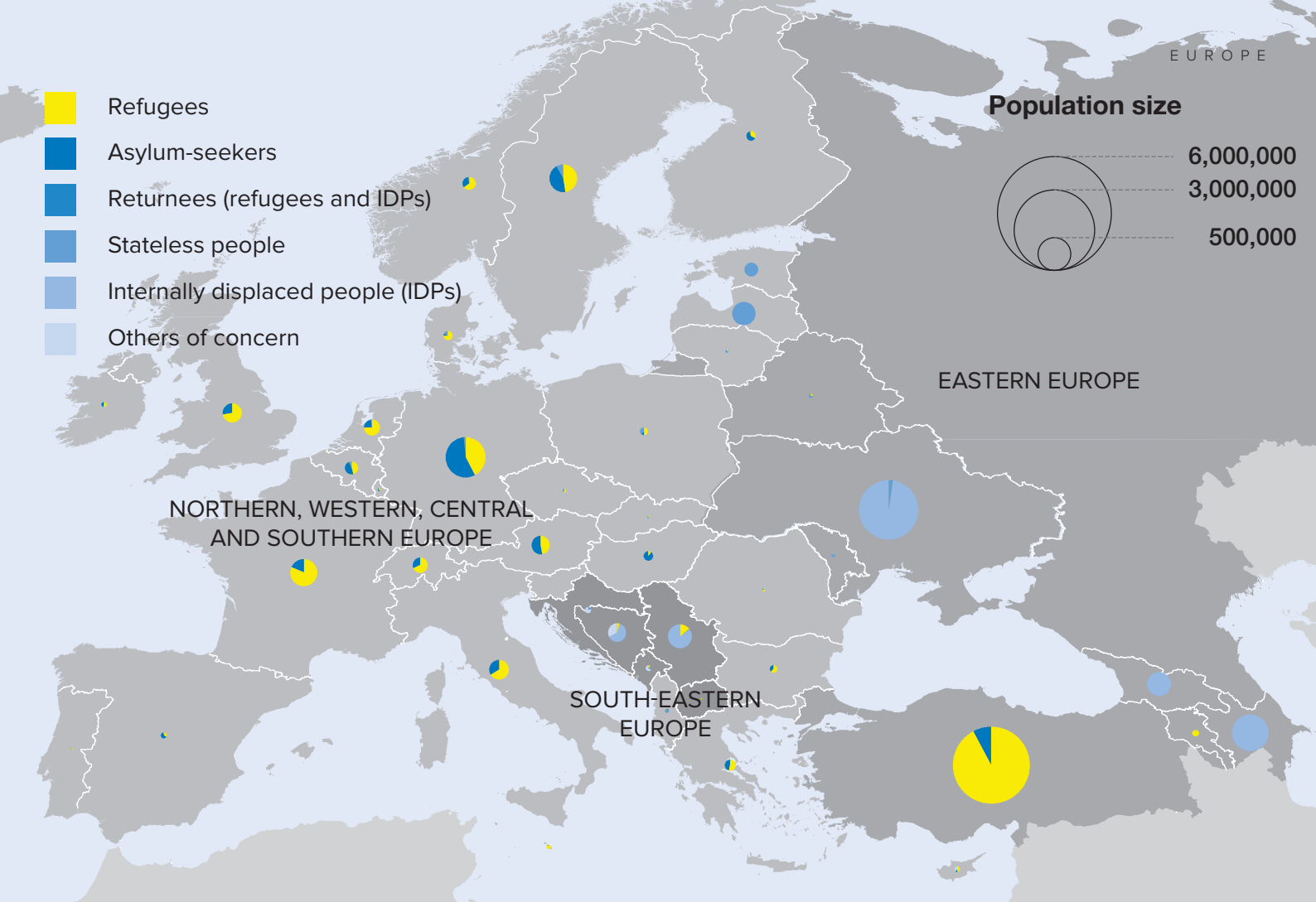
UNHCR also continued to respond to the critical humanitarian needs of many forcibly displaced people in Ukraine, where access was sometimes challenging.

MAJOR OPERATIONS

This overview highlights key aspects of the main situations that required emergency or sustained response from UNHCR and its partners in 2015. More details on individual operations are available in the relevant subregional and country operations pages on the Global Focus website (http://reporting.unhcr.org).

Turkey remained host to the largest number of refugees in the world. The Government of Turkey registered more than 2.5 million Syrians by year end, of whom approximately 10 per cent resided in camps and the remainder in urban areas, and more than 250,000 asylum-seekers and refugees of other nationalities, predominantly Afghans and Iraqis, were also living in the country. Urban refugees continued to need significant support, particularly in the areas of education, livelihoods and social welfare.

Syrian refugees in Turkey benefitted from temporary protection, which granted them documentation and legal stay upon registration, as well as access to education, primary and emergency health care, and the labour market. Under the framework of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), the inter-agency response to the Syria crisis, UNHCR continued to support Turkey's implementation of the temporary protection regulation, and Syrian refugees' access to rights and entitlements.

Refugees

Asylum-seekers

Returnees (refugees and IDPs)

Stateless people

Internally displaced people (IDPs)

Others of concern

Population size

6,000,000

3,000,000

500,000

EASTERN EUROPE

NORTHERN, WESTERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE

SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

Greece experienced an unprecedented increase in new arrivals by sea with more than 850,000 arrivals in 2015, the vast majority of whom moved onwards through the Western Balkans to Northern and Western Europe. In response to this critical situation, UNHCR declared an internal level 2 emergency in July 2015 and launched a response to significantly scale up its presence and activities not only in Greece, but also in **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, **Serbia**, **Croatia**, **Slovenia** and **Hungary**. In close coordination with national authorities, NGO partners, and civil society, including volunteers, UNHCR provided protection and assistance to people of concern, including support to emergency reception arrangements, and with a particular focus on those with specific needs.

The humanitarian situation in eastern **Ukraine** remained precarious, with large-scale displacement challenging resources and diminishing the resilience of both internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities. The poor economic situation complicated the pursuit of livelihoods, availability of adequate accommodation and ability to meet basic living costs. Most of the internally displaced were not eligible to vote, presenting obstacles to representation, integration and solutions.

The situation for civilians living near the contact line (between government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas) in Ukraine was particularly difficult. Restrictions on the movement of people and goods across contact lines were in place. In addition,

a registration process for humanitarian organizations, introduced by *de facto* authorities in non-government-controlled areas in June 2015, further complicated the humanitarian response. In 2015, UNHCR and OCHA were the only UN organizations authorized to conduct humanitarian activities in the self-proclaimed *Luhansk People's Republic*. In non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk, no UN organization was authorized to conduct humanitarian activities, and the lack of humanitarian access and presence to support the conflict-affected populations was of growing concern.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Emergency response in Europe

In the context of UNHCR's Special Mediterranean Initiative and the inter-agency Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, and in coordination with Governments, NGOs and civil society, and volunteers, the Office in 2015 launched emergency response operations in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia.

In accordance with UNHCR's Regional Protection Strategy, the response aimed at ensuring access to asylum; ensuring a protection-centred humanitarian response, taking into account age, gender and diversity and with particular attention to those with specific needs, strengthening protection systems and providing for during solutions. Activities included significantly strengthening partnership and coordination structures together with governments to strengthen

asylum systems and other national institutions providing protection for people of concern; enhancing protection, border, and detention monitoring and interventions; providing emergency assistance and supporting efforts to provide emergency reception capacity; strengthening efforts to communicate with people of concern; and further developing analysis and reporting capacity.

As part of its overall response strategy and in particular to mitigate the effects of the winter, UNHCR and partners distributed 41,335 blankets, 3,123 hygiene kits, 4,662 mats and 9,434 raincoats in Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. Significant investments were made to prepare reception and accommodation facilities for winter.

Safeguarding asylum space

UNHCR continued to advocate for access to territory and protection against refoulement in all countries, particularly along the Western Balkans route and in key countries responding to the Europe emergency. UNHCR and partners maintained a continuous presence at key borders and transit points, working to ensure essential services were available when needed, and potential protection concerns could be addressed in a timely and efficient manner. Efforts ranged from interventions in cases of violence, including pushbacks; advocating for access to asylum; preventing family separation and reunifying those who had been separated; providing information on legal options and available services; and supporting authorities to respond to the influx. In this context, UNHCR placed a particular focus on assuring protection-centred interventions for all people of concern, including those with specific needs.

Often working together with partners, UNHCR conducted regular and systematic protection monitoring at border entry and exit points, and in detention centres. Of particular concern was the issue of detention of children in some countries. Moreover, access to people of concern in detention remained limited in some countries, further restricting the protection space.

UNHCR also provided support to national asylum systems in Greece, and along the Western Balkans route, by providing technical guidance, equipment, and training. Furthermore, essential information was disseminated to people regarding their rights under international refugee law and under the national legislation of the country in which they found themselves. Civil society organizations working to help the arrivals were also supported by the Office.

In Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, Phase II of the Asylum Systems Quality Initiative (2015–2017) was launched, following requests for continuation by participating Governments. Phase II maintains the focus on bringing asylum systems in the region in line with international and European norms, and targets an expanded audience of border guards and judges involved in asylum cases, in addition to first-instance decision makers.

Reducing protection risks

UNHCR significantly strengthened its presence in all countries affected by the refugee crisis in Europe in order to assist authorities in mitigating and responding to protection risks. Working together with partners, interventions ranged from support to emergency reception arrangements and providing emergency assistance, to providing and coordinating protection services for people with specific needs, including separated and unaccompanied children.

UNHCR worked to strengthen communications with affected communities throughout Europe, to ensure that communication was two way, participatory and responsive so as to better address protection risks through a well-informed response. UNHCR provided information on asylum procedures, available services, legal options, and rights and obligations to people of concern. Information was provided in multiple languages through group information sessions, printed leaflets, sign boards, loudspeaker, and individual counselling. Efforts were also made to solicit information from people of concern, mostly through direct engagement, participatory assessments, and profiling, to better understand and respond to their needs.

UNHCR, together with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other partners, developed and instituted the innovative Child and Family Support Hubs ("Blue Dot" hubs), to ensure basic services and necessary protection interventions were available to women, children, and individuals with specific needs in key transit points and areas of operation.

In line with the 17-point plan of action agreed upon by concerned States at the Meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route on 25 October 2015, UNHCR worked together with authorities and partners to enhance reception facilities in all countries affected by the emergency. This included working to provide gender-separated and well-lit water, sanitation and hygiene facilities; safe places for women and children; child-friendly spaces; the provision of medical and psychosocial first aid; and the

availability of legal counselling and information on asylum procedures. However, many of the reception centres fell short of recognized humanitarian standards in this respect. Consequently significant protection risks remained, including risks of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as large gaps in prevention and response mechanisms.

UNHCR also worked with partners to strengthen national welfare and child protection systems, with a particular focus on separated and unaccompanied children. However, the impact of UNHCR's interventions varied, and depended on the willingness and capacity of local and national authorities.

Expanding opportunities for durable solutions

Throughout 2015, UNHCR worked to expand opportunities for both durable and longer-term solutions for people of concern by continually advocating for legal pathways to Europe (both EU and non-EU countries) from countries of first asylum and countries hosting large refugee populations. The Office welcomed the adoption of the conclusions on resettlement by the Council of the EU for 20,000 people over a two-year period (2015-2017), but is concerned about the restrictions some EU Member States are introducing on family reunification.

UNHCR continued advocating large-scale resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes, as well as additional complementary pathways for admission, such as family reunification and student scholarship programmes.

Inside Europe, UNHCR advocated for, welcomed and provided in-kind support for the EU-wide response mechanism for relocating people in clear need of international protection from Greece and Turkey to other EU Member States.

In its statement of 25 October 2015, EU leaders agreed on a 17-point plan of action to address the unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean-Western Balkans route. The plan specifically called on UNHCR to support Greek authorities to create an additional 50,000 places in reception capacity for people in search of international protection – 30,000 places to be provided by the Government while UNHCR would create 20,000 more places primarily for the purpose of relocating asylum-seekers from Greece to other countries within the context of the EU's "hotspot approach". On 14 December 2015, a joint declaration was signed between UNHCR, the Ministry for Migration Policy, and the European Commission to formalize implementation modalities including funding for increasing the reception capacity in Greece.

In South-Eastern Europe, the Regional Office, which was established in Sarajevo in January 2015, worked with country operations to identify and address the needs of vulnerable families who had been displaced since the 1990s, with a view to phasing out UNHCR's operational engagement for these populations by the end of 2017.

Addressing statelessness

In 2015, initiatives to prevent statelessness were taken throughout Europe.

Italy acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and Turkey acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. In addition, legislative amendments were adopted in Estonia. Armenia amended its

nationality law granting nationality to all children born on the territory who would otherwise be stateless. The Parliament of Montenegro adopted legislation to allow cost-free judicial procedures for late birth registration of those born outside the formal health-care system, benefiting in particular members of the Roma communities. The Republic of Moldova conducted a nationwide campaign that led to the issuance of Moldovan nationality documents as of July 2015 to more than 212,000 people who had previously held expired Soviet passports and had not been formally recognized as Moldovan citizens.

On the initiative of the Luxembourg Presidency, a first ever Conclusion of the Council of the EU on statelessness was adopted in December 2015, inviting the European Commission and EU Member States to exchange good practices and to actively coordinate national statelessness efforts.

Ukraine emergency response

In 2015, UNHCR worked with the Government of Ukraine, local authorities, and non-governmental organizations to identify and respond to the immediate and long-term needs of IDPs through protection monitoring and the distribution of shelter and core relief assistance. The Office was actively engaged in protection advocacy at legislative and policy levels and successfully lobbied for amendments adopted in December 2015 to align the existing IDP law more closely with the Office's *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. UNHCR continued to lead the protection and shelter/NFI clusters and the organization's internal level-2 emergency was extended to March 2016. In response to acute humanitarian needs, UNHCR undertook a USD 6 million

winterization programme across eastern Ukraine, which included cash assistance.

CONSTRAINTS

The rapid pace at which people were moving across the Western Balkans route, coupled with their sense of urgency, throughout 2015 presented challenges to UNHCR's ability to identify specific needs and provide assistance to people of concern. More specifically, the transient nature of the population placed limitations on UNHCR's ability to effectively communicate with those of concern and obtain their feedback; provide services in a timely manner, especially for people with specific needs; and engage with individuals in the absence of the traditional community structure UNHCR is accustomed to working with. Further, sudden changes in the routes of movement, mainly resulting from border closures and restrictions, made it difficult to ensure that field presence was maintained in locations where it was necessary. For this reason, UNHCR expanded its preparedness across the entire region and invested in detailed analysis and prediction of travel routes, which informed contingency planning.

Protecting people on the move has been made all the more difficult by the exploitative efforts of large-scale smuggling networks across the route. Increased border restrictions have consequently resulted in the heightened dependence on illicit groups able to facilitate movement into Western and Northern Europe, thereby exposing people of concern to greater protection risks, including trafficking. The inherently invisible nature of associations with, and movement under, the management of such groups made UNHCR's efforts to access people of concern challenging. ■

Financial information

The original 2015 budget for the Europe region approved by the Executive Committee in 2014 amounted to USD 480.5 million. At the end of 2015, the revised budget for 2015 had increased to USD 592 million, reflecting additional requirements including for: the emergency response in Europe (supplementary needs of USD 55 million); addressing the critical situation of IDPs in Ukraine (supplementary needs of USD 38.4 million); and responding to the growing number of Iraqi refugees in Europe (supplementary needs of USD 15.7 million).

Total voluntary contributions received for the region amounted to USD 234.6 million, leaving almost 60 per cent of the region's needs unmet.

Some 30 per cent of funds were allocated to protection advocacy and capacity-building activities, support to IDPs, and statelessness prevention and response measures in Europe. Support for Syrian refugees accounted for 52 per cent of available resources, while 9 per cent of resources addressed the emergency response to the crisis in Europe.

Expenditure in Europe | 2011-2015

Millions (USD)

Legend: Pillar 1, Pillar 2, Pillar 3, Pillar 4
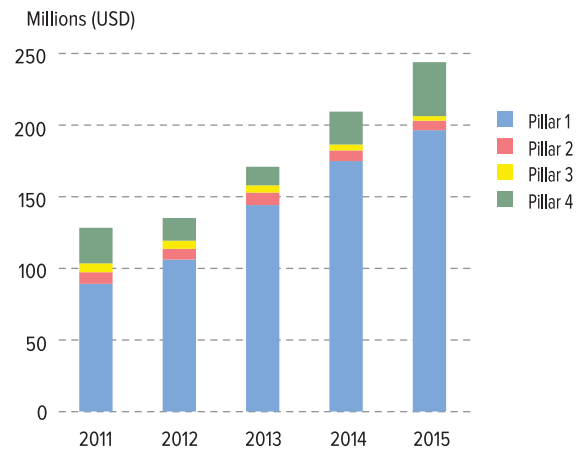
BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE IN EUROPE | USD

Operation		Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	Total
EASTERN EUROPE						
Armenia	Budget	6,327,127	102,341	0	0	6,429,468
	Expenditure	2,968,294	33,495	0	0	3,001,789
Azerbaijan	Budget	4,324,490	328,525	0	1,196,986	5,850,001
	Expenditure	2,194,694	44,892	0	455,888	2,695,475
Georgia	Budget	5,753,157	556,293	0	8,330,304	14,639,755
	Expenditure	3,351,029	326,984	0	3,564,740	7,242,752
Russian Federation	Budget	5,432,067	683,585	0	0	6,115,652
	Expenditure	3,206,150	610,448	0	0	3,816,598
Turkey	Budget	336,315,753	70,000	0	0	336,385,753
	Expenditure	82,060,073	19,614	0	0	82,079,687
Ukraine Regional Office[1]	Budget	12,333,912	1,010,001	0	37,322,129	50,666,042
	Expenditure	4,376,188	107,328	0	23,951,120	28,434,636
Subtotal	**Budget**	**370,486,506**	**2,750,744**	**0**	**46,849,419**	**420,086,670**
	Expenditure	**98,156,428**	**1,142,761**	**0**	**27,971,748**	**127,270,937**
SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE						
Bosnia and Herzegovina Regional Office[2]	Budget	28,612,473	3,844,207	5,793,306	22,755,682	61,005,667
	Expenditure	20,240,933	2,323,369	2,027,760	9,719,624	34,311,686
Subtotal	**Budget**	**28,612,473**	**3,844,207**	**5,793,306**	**22,755,682**	**61,005,667**
	Expenditure	**20,240,933**	**2,323,369**	**2,027,760**	**9,719,624**	**34,311,686**
NORTHERN, WESTERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE						
Belgium Regional Office[3]	Budget	14,280,960	2,054,558	0	0	16,335,518
	Expenditure	11,246,544	1,925,245	0	0	13,171,790
Hungary Regional Office[4]	Budget	20,601,408	1,702,007	1,191,163	0	23,494,579
	Expenditure	15,441,686	301,783	1,053,167	0	16,796,637
Italy Regional Office[5]	Budget	39,460,925	177,949	0	0	39,638,874
	Expenditure	32,404,465	134,097	0	0	32,538,562
Sweden Regional Office[6]	Budget	4,518,289	965,440	0	0	5,483,728
	Expenditure	2,278,669	659,958	0	0	2,938,627
Regional activities	Budget	25,742,357	227,257	0	0	25,969,614
	Expenditure	16,492,322	222,146	0	0	16,714,468
Subtotal	**Budget**	**104,603,939**	**5,127,211**	**1,191,163**	**0**	**110,922,314**
	Expenditure	**77,863,687**	**3,243,229**	**1,053,167**	**0**	**82,160,083**
Total Europe	**Budget**	**503,702,919**	**11,722,163**	**6,984,469**	**69,605,101**	**592,014,650**
	Expenditure	**196,261,048**	**6,709,359**	**3,080,927**	**37,691,372**	**243,742,706**

[1] Includes activities in Belarus and the Republic of Moldova
[2] Includes activities in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo(S/RES/1244)1999)) and Montenegro
[3] Includes activities in Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the Liaison Office in Switzerland and the United Kingdom
[4] Includes activities in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia
[5] Includes activities in Cyprus, Greece, Malta and Spain
[6] Includes activities in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway

VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO EUROPE | USD

Donor	Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	All pillars	Total
Andorra					8,436	8,436
Armenia					98,000	98,000
Austria	851,166				50,704	901,870
Azerbaijan	20,400					20,400
Belgium	79,955					79,955
Canada	2,092,825				1,573,564	3,666,389
Central Emergency Response Fund	834,600					834,600
Council of Europe Development Bank				407,214		407,214
Croatia					24,957	24,957
Czech Republic					40,000	40,000
Denmark				1,522,533		1,522,533
Estonia	112,233			165,508		277,742
European Union	16,475,756		795,623	12,082,844		29,354,223
Finland				541,712		541,712
France	5,571,723					5,571,723
Georgia					30,000	30,000
Germany	2,163,173			4,349,919	1,030,878	7,543,970
Greece					22,124	22,124
Hungary					200,000	200,000
International Organization for Migration	16,984				75,932	92,916
Ireland	254,710					254,710
Italy	5,065,409			135,870	196,275	5,397,553
Japan	6,600,000				2,918,612	9,518,612
Kuwait	890,000					890,000
Latvia				52,910		52,910
Luxembourg					10,204	10,204
Malta	44,893					44,893
Montenegro					82,745	82,745
Netherlands	675,000					675,000
Norway	1,402,924			1,018,978	261,203	2,683,106
Poland					70,000	70,000
Portugal				54,466	110,619	165,086
Private donors in Australia	963,365					963,365
Private donors in Austria					11	11
Private donors in Canada				1,508	352,780	354,288
Private donors in China (Hong Kong SAR)	456,318					456,318
Private donors in Denmark	11,536					11,536
Private donors in France					113,574	113,574
Private donors in Germany	1,096,491			725,482	1,092,896	2,914,870
Private donors in Greece	43,860				29,081	72,940
Private donors in Ireland					1,125	1,125
Private donors in Italy	40,592				636,887	677,479
Private donors in Japan	443,553			192,543		636,095
Private donors in Lichtenstein	168,729					168,729
Private donors in Philippines	9,536					9,536

Donor	Pillar 1 Refugee programme	Pillar 2 Stateless programme	Pillar 3 Reintegration projects	Pillar 4 IDP projects	All pillars	Total
Private donors in Spain	2,762,617				2,219,830	4,982,447
Private donors in Sweden	11,177,399				11,750	11,189,149
Private donors in Switzerland	15,694			338	2,590,889	2,606,921
Private donors in the Netherlands	80,996					80,996
Private donors in the United Arab Emirates	250,000					250,000
Private donors in the United Kingdom	15,152			305	3,281,574	3,297,030
Private donors in the United States of America	756,048				2,615,968	3,372,016
Private donors in Turkey	40,000					40,000
Qatar	2,527,596					2,527,596
Republic of Korea					2,300,000	2,300,000
Romania					160,000	160,000
Russian Federation		200,000		100,000	300,000	600,000
Slovenia	55,600					55,600
Spain	531,686				359,477	891,163
Sweden				1,788,909		1,788,909
Switzerland	1,599,663			343,392	1,131,687	3,074,743
United Arab Emirates	200,293					200,293
United Kingdom	24,430,208			1,526,718		25,956,926
United Nations Development Programme	46,200					46,200
United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security				76,635		76,635
United States of America	56,500,000				37,000,000	93,500,000
World Food Programme	129,630					129,630
Total	**147,504,513**	**200,000**	**795,623**	**25,087,785**	**61,001,783**	**234,589,704**

Note: Includes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions to Pillars 3 and 4, supplementary budgets and the "New or additional activities – mandate-related" (NAM) Reserve