

Main objectives

- Support the Government of Turkey's efforts to develop new legislative and institutional arrangements for the reception and protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, in conformity with international standards.
- Advise the Government on the protection needs of individual asylum-seekers from non-European countries and ensure efficient and fair refugee status determination (RSD) under UNHCR's Mandate.
- Promote durable solutions for refugees through local integration, resettlement to third countries, or voluntary repatriation – including to and from Iraq when circumstances permit.
- Build partnerships with the Government and NGOs aimed at meeting the basic needs of asylum-seekers for material, medical, social and psychological support, with a special emphasis on the needs of refugee women and children.
- Raise public awareness of the problems of asylum-seekers and refugees and build support for Turkey's efforts to protect and assist them.



Working environment

Recent developments

Turkey's candidacy for European Union membership has entered a critical phase, with important implications for refugee protection and UNHCR. In the field of asylum, the European Council's new Accession Partnership for Turkey calls for action on alignment with EU standards. The Turkish government has responded with an updated National Programme for meeting the criteria for EU membership. This sets the agenda for strengthening the national asylum system during 2004 and 2005.

The new National Programme renews Turkey's conditional commitment to eventually lifting

the "geographic limitation" that currently restricts its application of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol to refugees of European origin. No timeframe is given for that move. However, the National Programme does specify the conditions that must be met, including having the legal framework and infrastructure in place to deal with the broader responsibilities and "sensitivity" of the EU Member States on the issue of burden sharing.

The National Programme foresees the enactment of new asylum legislation; the establishment of a specialised body for RSD under the Ministry of the Interior; the recruitment and training of staff; the establishment of reception facilities for asylum-seekers, and other measures needed to meet their basic social needs. During 2003 and 2004, the Danish and British Governments will lend their expertise to a twinning project aimed at formulating an action plan for implementing Turkey's national strategy in the asylum field.

The Turkish Government's intensive efforts to meet the criteria for EU membership should also improve the

Planning figures		
Population	Jan. 2004	Dec. 2004
Asylum-seekers	2,000	1,800
Islamic Republic of Iran (refugees)	1,600	1,500
Serbia and Montenegro and BiH (refugees)	750	740
Other refugees	750	560
Total	5,100	4,600

Total requirements: USD 5,377,132

prospects for voluntary repatriation of Turkish refugees in Iraq. The constitutional and legislative reforms include new guarantees for the linguistic and cultural rights of the ethnic Kurdish minority. In August 2003, Turkey also enacted amnesty legislation that may contribute toward creating the conditions for return.

Constraints

The war in Iraq and its aftermath have had implications for UNHCR's programmes in Turkey. Plans for the voluntary repatriation of Iraqi refugees are on hold until the security situation stabilises and minimum conditions for return are established. Meanwhile, nearly all resettlement countries have frozen their consideration of applications by Iraqis. With no way back and no way forward, at least for the present, Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers have remained dependent on UNHCR assistance for an extended period and are growing increasingly frustrated. Similarly, more than 1,200 Iranian refugees who entered Turkey from Iraq since 2001 have not opted to return home.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

In 2004, Turkey will take crucial decisions regarding the development of its national asylum system. UNHCR will offer its support through expert advice and the reorientation and expansion of its already intensive refugee law training programmes for Turkish officials. Funding from one major donor will also enable UNHCR to organise study tours and commission research. This will help the Turkish Government to consider the relative merits of the asylum systems of other European countries and benefit from their experience. The same funding will also allow UNHCR to provide refugee protection training for bar associations and national NGOs.

Until Turkey establishes a comprehensive national asylum system and lifts the "geographic limitation", UNHCR must continue to conduct RSD under its mandate and to find solutions for those accorded refugee status, mainly through resettlement. The RSD process is a painstaking, labour-intensive activity, and can only be conducted fairly and efficiently if staffing levels are sufficient.

UNHCR stands ready to take advantage of any appropriate opportunities for voluntary repatriation that may emerge in 2004. UNHCR has plans in place to facilitate the return of up to 1,000 Iraqi refugees, asylum-seekers and others of concern, when conditions permit. UNHCR will provide potential returnees with counselling and information regarding conditions in Iraq. Those

who opt for voluntary repatriation will receive help with documentation, clearance procedures and assistance that may include cash grants and support for travel, accommodation, food and medical care *en route*.

Since 1996, UNHCR has facilitated the return of some 2,300 Turkish refugees from Iraq. While current planning foresees continued small-scale returns during 2004, UNHCR is ready to work for the voluntary repatriation of larger numbers within an agreed legal and operational framework. Turkish returnees will be registered by UNHCR and receive food and shelter packages upon arrival. Legal counselling will also be available. The reintegration of the returnees would also be enhanced by bringing them within the scope of a broader development initiative aimed at addressing problems in internal displacement.

Assistance

UNHCR will remain a major source of economic and social support for non-European refugees and asylum-seekers during their stay in Turkey. A key priority for UNHCR and its NGO partners in 2004 will be the extension of social counselling services beyond Istanbul and Ankara, where they are currently available, to various central Anatolian cities where refugees and asylum-seekers reside. UNHCR provides all assistance based on individual needs. Refugees in need receive monthly allowances and medical assistance. Due to budgetary constraints, only asylum-seekers in dire poverty are provided with special one-time payments and emergency medical assistance during consideration of their claims.

The medical assistance programme for women covers pre- and post-natal medical care and childbirth. Families with children attending Turkish primary schools receive grants to cover the cost of school supplies, uniforms and shoes. UNHCR provides emergency accommodation assistance for women in a vulnerable situation, including those who have escaped a situation of domestic violence or sexual abuse and exploitation. UNHCR's Gender and Children Team (GCT) ensures the implementation of policy in these priority areas, with NGO participation, and monitors the results.

Desired impact

UNHCR is helping Turkey to build a national asylum system based upon international standards and good practices which offers reliable protection and real solutions for refugees. As Turkey makes increasing progress in this endeavour, UNHCR will be able to eventually reduce its operational activities and assume the oversight role foreseen in the 1951 Refugee Convention. In the interim,

UNHCR will continue to carry out RSD, to work towards the achievement of solutions for refugees, and to meet their basic needs while they stay in Turkey.

Organisation and implementation

Management structure

UNHCR operates from a main office in Ankara and maintains a field presence in Istanbul, Silopi and Van. Six international officers, two JPOs, 71 national staff, and four

national UNVs manage the country programme. The largest number of staff is engaged in RSD and resettlement.

Co-ordination

In the provision of social and psychological counselling services and healthcare, UNHCR collaborates with three international NGOs, four national NGOs and a Turkish university. These partners, along with IOM, are also members of the Gender and Children Team, which supports and monitors the implementation of policy and practices in these priority areas.



Turkey

UNHCR also participates actively in the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and works closely with IOM on refugee resettlement and voluntary repatriation. UNHCR is collaborating within the framework of the UNCT to develop a United Nations-system response to the recommendations made by the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, following his 2002 mission to Turkey.



Offices

Ankara

Istanbul

Silopi

Van

Partners

NGOs

Association for Solidarity with Asylum-seekers and Migrants

Caritas

Hacettepe University School of Social Work

Human Resources Development Foundation

International Catholic Migration Commission

Inter-Parish Migration Programme

Psychological Services Institute

Turkish Red Crescent Society

Budget (USD)

Activities and services	Annual Programme
Protection, monitoring and co-ordination	1,526,183
Community services	191,276
Domestic needs	777,456
Education	33,260
Food	2,208
Health	242,280
Legal assistance	118,280
Operational support (to agencies)	55,100
Shelter / other infrastructure	30,240
Transport / logistics	39,900
Total Operations	3,016,183
Programme support	2,360,949
Total	5,377,132

Refugee children take a break for recreation.

UNHCR / A. Hollmann