

## **Update on UNHCR's Operations in Europe Executive Committee 2006**

### **Part A: Major Developments**

- In Western and Central Europe, the decreasing trend of individual asylum applications continued. At the same time, UNHCR remains concerned about the loss of life at sea and the increase in arrivals in particular to the Italian island of Lampedusa, Malta, the Canary Islands, and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The Office has developed a Ten Point Plan providing UNHCR's ideas and visions for how to respond to the number of situations involving mixed flows of migrants and asylum-seekers. In the European context, the Office is involved in the continuation, in 2007, of the joint programme between the Government of Italy, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR and the Italian Red Cross to monitor and support arrivals in Lampedusa. In Spain, the Office has increased its presence and capacity-building activities in the Canary Islands and the Spanish enclaves. The Office has also supported solutions in particularly difficult situations, such as in Malta which has received overwhelming numbers of new arrivals. This included most recently the successful disembarkation of 51 persons rescued at sea in July, in which the support of the Governments of Spain, Italy, Portugal, Andorra, and the Netherlands was instrumental.
- In the Russian Federation, UNHCR is now allowed greater access to the Northern Caucasus, as the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS) has revised the security assessment of the situation in Chechnya, down to phase IV. This decision paves the way for the opening of a field office in Grozny, which will allow UNHCR to be in a position to verify the extent of displacement within Chechnya, including verification of an estimated 30,000 returns over the past year, and provide more effective international protection and assistance to returnees.
- UNHCR's operations in the Northern and Southern Caucasus remain volatile and complex. The High Commissioner recently undertook missions to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Russian Federation where he highlighted the continuous need for protection of asylum-seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons and sought the Governments' commitment to collaborate with UNHCR in the search for durable solutions.
- UNHCR has updated its position paper on the Kosovo province of the Republic of Serbia, with the purpose of highlighting important political developments related to negotiations on the future status of Kosovo, against which consideration of the situation of minorities should be seen; assessing the current situation of ethnic minorities and identifying those in relation to whom there continue to be risks of persecution; and highlighting humanitarian needs of individuals from Kosovo that should be considered before taking a decision on possible return to Kosovo. In advance of the status determination, UNHCR has been in close contact with UNMIK and other relevant actors in determining the Office's eventual role in assisting individuals of its concern.
- The Bureau for Europe has been engaged in supporting UNHCR's efforts in the Lebanon crisis by providing logistics and protection in Malta and Greece. UNHCR Athens is extending effective cooperation to support the operation in Lebanon, especially in facilitating the logistics requirements between Headquarters and the logistics hub in Larnaca (Cyprus).

## **Part B: Progress on Strategic Objectives and Agenda for Protection**

### Strengthening the refugee protection framework

- In the European Union (EU), UNHCR is focusing particularly on the transposition of the **EU Directives** into national law, as well as to their application in practice. As transposition takes place, UNHCR is emphasizing that the Directives set minimum standards and that protection should not revolve around the lowest common denominator of existing national practice.
- Along the enlarged EU's borders, many of the new Member States are facing significant challenges. With regard to the Southern border, such challenges particularly relate to the increasing arrivals across the Mediterranean. Other challenges include establishing comprehensive migration policies, building national asylum systems that meet international standards, as well as finding durable solutions for refugees, including local integration. Along the Eastern border, UNHCR is actively involved in developing reception facilities in Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine as well as capacity-building initiatives through partnerships with other actors, in particular the European Commission through its Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries (TACIS) programme. Much work is being done and UNHCR, through its Regional Representation in Kyiv, continues its support while also furthering sub-regional and cross-border dialogue and cooperation on asylum and migration issues. The Cross-Border Cooperation Process ("Soderkoping Process") has proven to be an important forum and vehicle for such dialogue amongst these countries on the EU Eastern border, and between them and the EU. UNHCR will continue to foster such cross-border linkages, in cooperation with IOM and the Swedish Migration Board, and with the European Commission's support.

### Meeting the protection needs of refugee women and children

- UNHCR is implementing a consultative process on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), similarly to the cooperation developed with regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), for a more effective use of human rights instruments for the protection of refugee women and refugee children. A regional programme on refugee women and children continued to focus on equipping UNHCR country offices with improved skills to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). A training package on gender-sensitive analysis and procedures of gender-related asylum claims has been developed, and the Bureau will support the establishment and implementation of national plans and Standard Operating Procedures for SGBV prevention and response.
- Cooperation with the Separated Children Programme in Europe was at the centre of joint programming, position development and advocacy. Moreover, the Statement of Good Practice for the Protection and Care of Separated Children has been published and the roll-out of the UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) Strategy is progressing according to the implementation timetable and will be completed by the end of 2006 for approximately 70 per cent of country offices.