

Andorra  
Austria  
Belgium  
Cyprus  
Denmark  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Greece  
Holy See  
Iceland  
Ireland  
Italy  
Liechtenstein  
Luxembourg  
Malta  
Monaco  
Netherlands  
Norway  
Portugal  
San Marino  
Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
United Kingdom

## Western Europe

### Working environment

Many European States see the acceptance and integration of foreigners as a real challenge. Asylum, in the context of mixed migratory flows, has become a divisive political issue. National laws and practices have led to a more restrictive interpretation of the protection regime, based on a common denominator rather than on best practices.

Within this context, the number of asylum applications submitted in Western Europe is declining, with 14 per cent fewer applications in 2006 than the year before. Austria saw a reduction of 41 per cent in asylum applications in 2006, Belgium a reduction of 27 per cent, and Finland, France and the United Kingdom declines of 36, 38 and 10 per cent, respectively.

Nevertheless, other countries faced substantive increases in the number of asylum-seekers. The number of applications in Sweden surged by 39 per cent and in Greece by 36 per cent, while the Netherlands and Italy saw rises of 17 and 6 per cent, respectively. France currently receives the most asylum applications per year in Western Europe (followed by Germany and the United Kingdom), while Cyprus and Malta have received the highest number of asylum applications per capita in the world.



## Strategy

UNHCR will work to preserve asylum space in the broader migration context, uphold protection standards, search for durable solutions and seek resources for global refugee protection. The Office will strengthen its partnership with the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Centre for Migration Policy and Development (ICMPD), FRONTEX, and other organizations and institutions including NGOs.

The Office will seek to expand the number of European countries involved in resettlement activities, and mobilize political and financial support for refugees and UNHCR operations worldwide. A strong effort will be made to expand operational partnerships.

As part of UNHCR's regionalization efforts, its offices in Europe will be consolidated from 2008 to 2009. A longer-term goal will be to reduce the number of regional offices to three and strengthen these platforms taking into account the national context and the continued need for UNHCR presence.

## Constraints

The mixed flow of undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers remains high on the political agenda throughout Europe. The image of asylum-seekers is often associated with illegal migrants, and frequently this image is exploited. In the face of security and other concerns, Western European countries have tightened border-control measures, thus reducing asylum space.

## Operations

### Harmonization of European asylum policy

In the ongoing European harmonization process, UNHCR will monitor, provide technical advice and support the transposition of EU laws into national legal frameworks which adhere to the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR's priorities will be to improve the quality of RSD and accessible asylum procedures, especially in view of the European Union's objective to agree on a common asylum system.

### Preserving space for asylum in the broader migration context

Along the eastern and Mediterranean borders of the EU Member States, UNHCR will monitor States' practices through visits, seeking to ensure that applicants have access to territory and procedures. UNHCR will evaluate reception facilities, especially in southern Europe, as their capacity is frequently insufficient or inappropriate for asylum-seekers. The Office is also increasingly concerned that an ever-growing number of States are resorting to the detention of asylum-seekers.

### Search for durable solutions

UNHCR will pursue the identification and realization of durable solutions for refugees, including voluntary return and resettlement. The Office will undertake public information and advocacy measures to support local integration in Europe. It will work to create an effective burden-sharing system, particularly with EU Member States, that addresses the specific needs of persons requiring international protection.

### Supporting UNHCR's work worldwide through partnerships

Major platforms for collaboration include the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Union, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Organization for Migration, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and NGOs. Regional representations play a key role in mobilizing resources from governmental, corporate and private sources for global operations.

UNHCR's priorities in **Austria** include quality initiatives to enhance asylum procedures related to monitoring, RSD, training and the provision of country of origin information. The Government has a long-standing backlog of pending asylum applications. Upcoming legislation – to which UNHCR will contribute – includes procedural changes for appeals, detention practices, integration including access to the labour market.

The Regional Representation in **Belgium** promotes protection and durable solutions in the Benelux countries and endeavours to influence policy and to mobilize resources among EU institutions, international organizations and a vast array of NGOs, think-tanks and foundations. It is at the forefront of efforts to promote international refugee protection standards while at the same time mobilizing resources to support UNHCR's global activities.

Since its inception in 2002, **Cyprus'** asylum system has witnessed a tenfold increase in applications. UNHCR will support enhanced implementation of the asylum system and prevent abuse through strengthened and more transparent procedures. Activities to combat xenophobic attitudes will target schools, teachers and volunteer groups.

In **France**, access to the territory and fair procedures remain of prime importance for asylum-seekers. UNHCR will continue to work with the *Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (OFPRA)*, participate as a member in the *Commission des Recours des Réfugiés (CRR)* and interact with a network of asylum and migration NGOs. Through these interactions, the Office aims to achieve greater consideration of the specific needs of asylum applicants and to prevent *refoulement*.

In **Germany**, UNHCR is in close dialogue with asylum authorities, the courts, relevant ministries and lawyers regarding the transposition of EU directives. Moreover, it is particularly focused on procedures which permit the revocation of refugee status. Germany is an important counterpart for humanitarian aid and durable solutions, and therefore UNHCR will continue to seek the support of the Government and the private sector.

With limited possibilities to adequately control access to its 6,000 islands and mountainous borders, **Greece** is a major transit country for undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers. Low recognition rates and limited social services deter persons of concern from seeking asylum. UNHCR works with the authorities and NGOs to streamline and improve the quality of asylum procedures and to decrease the backlog of applications and waiting periods. The Office also seeks to improve asylum-seeker reception conditions and increase understanding of asylum. Improved systems are also needed to identify, refer and protect persons of concern with special needs.

The authorities in **Ireland** aim to pass and begin implementation of EU asylum directives by the end of 2008. UNHCR will seek to strengthen asylum by ensuring access to the territory, and by promoting fair and efficient protection legislation. The Office will endeavour to increase Ireland's resettlement quota and support integration, including the naturalization of recognized refugees. UNHCR in Ireland works with partners to support refugees, initiate public-information activities and strengthen relationships with donors such as Irish Aid.



UNHCR/L. Baldrini

Italy. Arrival of boat people whose craft was intercepted by the Italian coast guard off of the coast of Lampedusa.

In **Italy**, UNHCR works with the Central Service for the Protection of Asylum-Seekers and Refugees and the National Association of Municipalities to enhance the integration of recognized refugees, especially those with specific needs such as victims of torture or unaccompanied minors. The Office is maintaining a mobile team on the coast of Sicily while working to handover monitoring tasks to local partners. UNHCR will also work to combat racism and xenophobia, which affect the Roma communities, immigrants and asylum-seekers of African origin.

The transposition of EU directives will result in a comprehensive asylum law and their implementing arrangements. UNHCR advocates that admissibility clauses be fair, that applicants be permitted to remain in the country until the appeal process is completed and that police practices be harmonized throughout the country. UNHCR is concerned about the use of automatic detention for asylum-seekers. The Office seeks to maximize private-sector fundraising from regular contributors and corporate structures.

In **Malta**, asylum-seekers are detained for up to one year in similar conditions as economic migrants. UNHCR recognizes Malta's absorption capacity is limited and has sought international burden sharing to which the United States, Canada, Australia and Portugal have responded positively. Nevertheless, local integration opportunities are also encouraged to be offered for refugees.

In **Portugal**, UNHCR has submitted comments on the draft Asylum Law and is prepared to continue discussions with lawmakers and relevant stakeholders to attain international standards. UNHCR works with competent authorities and civil society to enhance the protection space.

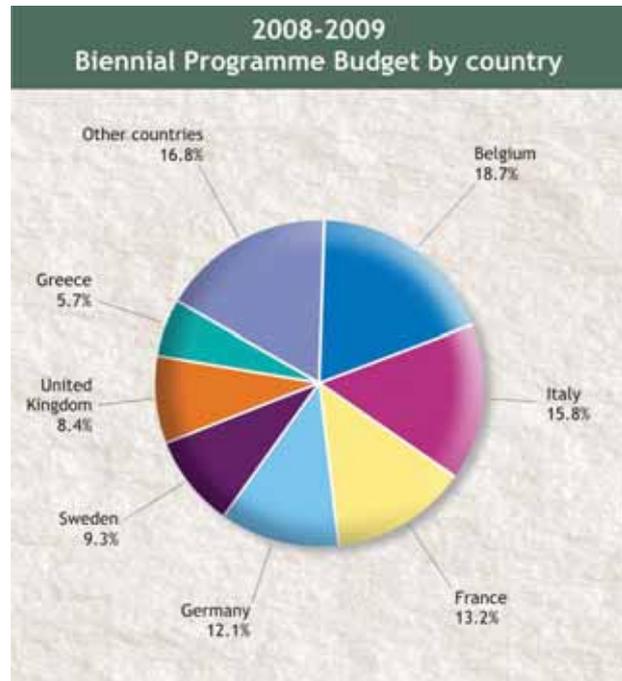
In **Spain**, close cooperation with relevant government bodies, including the Ombudsperson, will support the preservation of asylum space in the face of mixed-migration flows and build on progress achieved in 2007. Special efforts will be undertaken to address the large number of unaccompanied minors.

In **Sweden**, UNHCR will, in the region, monitor and address gaps and changes in asylum legislation, policy and practice; enhance protection partnerships; campaign for resource mobilization; and raise awareness of asylum and migration issues among the public, civil society and the media.

Although **Switzerland** is not a member of the European Union, it is expected to join the EU Dublin II Agreement in 2008. As elsewhere, issues of migration and security are closely linked to the asylum debate. UNHCR will advocate for the highest possible protection standards, extend collaboration with cantonal authorities and advocate the re-opening of a resettlement programme. It will also seek to strengthen the integration of people enjoying subsidiary forms of protection.

Irregular migration and the deportation of unsuccessful asylum claimants remain issues of national concern in the **United Kingdom**. The Office will continue its involvement with the Quality Initiative (QI) project, which is a tool by which UNHCR assists the Government to attain high RSD standards. UNHCR also supports the implementation of the Gateway Protection Programme, which seeks the resettlement of diverse refugee groups within local communities.

UNHCR will advocate for appropriate support to be afforded to refugees and their dependants in pursuit



of local integration, including consideration of age, gender and other diversity factors. The Office will also collaborate with *pro bono* counsel to intervene in precedent-setting asylum cases before the House of Lords, Royal Courts of Justice and other key tribunals. Private-sector fund-raising initiatives are under way, in particular with the UN Refugee Agency UK Trust.

Budget (USD)			
Country	Annual Programme Budget		
	2007	2008	2009
Austria	903,189	955,395	955,395
Belgium	3,135,633	3,553,431	3,805,033
France	2,586,052	2,603,133	2,603,133
Germany	2,287,121	2,383,557	2,383,557
Greece	1,055,939	1,112,951	1,112,951
Ireland	622,061	671,690	671,690
Italy	2,583,528	3,030,090	3,162,160
Malta	35,320	39,221	39,221
Portugal	51,679	45,000	45,000
Spain	978,285	929,701	929,701
Sweden	1,712,091	1,831,095	1,831,097
Switzerland	653,170	651,187	651,187
United Kingdom	1,499,071	1,644,736	1,657,690
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,103,139</b>	<b>19,451,187</b>	<b>19,847,815</b>