



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

UNHCR is lending its expertise to the European Union (EU) as it works to establish a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The system aims to uphold and improve the quality of protection within the EU. In this regard, some States are pursuing pragmatic strategies to distinguish between economic migrants and those in need of international protection. The overall picture is one of asylum-seekers and other migrants facing tighter border controls as Western European States try to stem illegal immigration. In some of these countries, the courts have played an important role in resisting attempts to water down protection standards.

In Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Portugal the number of new asylum applications submitted during the first six months of 2008 declined when compared to the figure for the same period in 2007. In Malta and Italy, however, the numbers rose significantly, while Germany, France, Switzerland and the Czech Republic saw modest increases. Sweden, France and Greece continue to receive the highest number of asylum applicants per capita.



Strategy

UNHCR works to preserve asylum space within the broader migration context by upholding protection standards, searching for durable solutions and seeking resources for global refugee protection. In pursuit of these aims, the Office will enhance strategic partnerships with the OSCE, IOM, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and FRONTEX (the EU agency for external border security).

Some Western European governments are increasing support for UNHCR's work within their national asylum systems. Such UNHCR involvement helps States to manage asylum claims in line with international protection standards. The Office will build on its experiences in Spain and Italy to foster better protection and asylum practices in Greece and Malta in 2009.

In 2009, the process of regionalization and decentralization will continue. The new Brussels Regional office will oversee UNHCR activities in nine countries: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

UNHCR will work with new resettlement countries to facilitate the identification, travel, reception and successful integration of individuals in need of this

solution. Operational partnerships with national and international NGOs will be crucial to the success of this programme.

Constraints

UNHCR is working in a climate in which political and economic factors influence the manner in which those seeking protection are received. Asylum-seekers fleeing persecution are often associated with irregular migrants, reducing sympathy for those in need of protection. UNHCR works with host Governments to ensure the proper reception of asylum-seekers within mixed groups of migrants.

In addition to inadequate reception conditions, negative public attitudes towards asylum-seekers hinder prospects for local integration. These factors and the limited access of asylum-seekers to the territory of Western European States pose difficulties for the Office.

Operations

Harmonization of European asylum policy

UNHCR will offer technical advice at the national and EU levels to foster the harmonization of asylum policies

in Europe. The Office collaborates closely with national institutions implementing laws and regulations in this area.

Enhancing space for asylum in the broader migration context

UNHCR intends to consolidate and expand established operations along the eastern and Mediterranean borders of EU member States to identify persons in need of international protection. The Office will continue to work with the Greek and Maltese authorities to improve reception conditions and asylum procedures. UNHCR remains concerned about the use of detention and substandard facilities to deter migration.

Search for durable solutions

UNHCR will search for durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation and resettlement, for refugees. It will also continue its public information and advocacy work to enhance local integration and offset the rise in xenophobic attitudes.

Supporting UNHCR's work through worldwide partnerships

Major platforms for collaboration include the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, IOM, ICRC and national Red Cross organizations. These are complemented by relationships with national and international NGOs. Regional Representatives play a key role in mobilizing resources from governmental, corporate and private sources for global operations.

In **Austria**, UNHCR's priorities include improving the quality of asylum decisions. Together with the Federal Asylum Agency and other partners, UNHCR will monitor procedures and the consistency of decisions. Vienna hosts the UNHCR-OSCE liaison Office.

UNHCR's priorities for its Regional office in **Belgium** include strengthening international protection through targeted court interventions, monitoring asylum procedures and working to prevent the detention of asylum-seekers. In 2008, participatory assessments in Belgium focused on the provision of information to asylum-seekers at the start of, and during the RSD procedure; in Luxembourg, they focused on access to employment. UNHCR has advocated for more resettlement places in the region, particularly in Belgium and Luxembourg. It is also raising awareness and support for asylum and refugee issues in the region.

The Office will continue its operational involvement in asylum procedures in **Cyprus**, which is struggling to manage a large influx of asylum-seekers.

In **France**, UNHCR will continue to collaborate with the *Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides* (OFPRA) and remain a member of the *Commission des Recours des Réfugiés* (CRR). Furthermore, it expects to build on experience gained through the reception of 500 Iraqi refugees in 2008 to foster resettlement in the country.

In **Germany**, UNHCR will maintain its advisory function in a legislative and juridical asylum context. Germany hosts the largest number of asylum-seekers and refugees among industrialized countries. After several years of declining numbers, UNHCR observed a slight increase in new asylum applications in 2008.

With Europe's third highest number of asylum applications, **Greece** has expressed readiness to draw on UNHCR's expertise as it strengthens its identification and RSD procedures. Joint assessments are planned for late 2008 in collaboration with Greek authorities and partners.

In **Ireland**, a new law on asylum and immigration will be adopted and implemented in 2009. The new legislation will establish a single procedure for refugee protection as well as the granting of permission to stay on humanitarian grounds for asylum-seekers who do not meet the criteria to be recognized as refugees but who cannot return either. The Irish Government has requested UNHCR's involvement in the early implementation phase of this single-procedure model.

In **Malta**, UNHCR will enhance its presence and foster international responsibility sharing in recognition of Malta's limited absorption capacity. The Office will collaborate with relevant governmental bodies to find durable solutions and to improve conditions in detention facilities.

The Nordic countries (**Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden**) receive large numbers of asylum-seekers. UNHCR's overarching goal will be to maintain and enhance the monitoring capacity of the Office and to influence the overall direction of national asylum policies, legislation and practice.

In **Italy**, UNHCR will cooperate closely with the Central Service for the Protection of Asylum-Seekers and Refugees and the National Association of Municipalities on the integration of recognized refugees. Mobile teams in Sicily, Sardinia and the south of Italy will identify individuals in need of protection as well as those with specific needs. UNHCR will continue to work with Italy's coast guard on rescue at sea operations.

In **Spain**, UNHCR works with government institutions to manage mixed migration flows in a protection-sensitive fashion, especially in the case of unaccompanied minors.



Sudanese refugees performing at the UNHCR's World Refugee Day event in London.

UNHCR/H. J. Davies

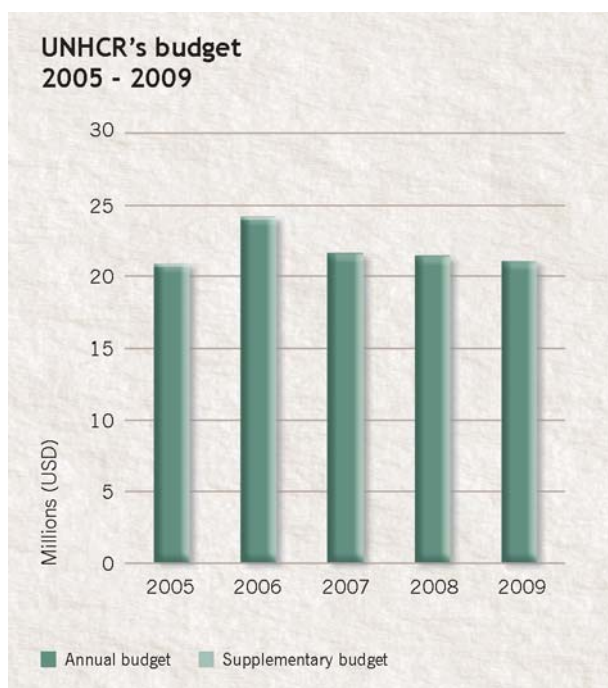
In **Switzerland** the Office aims to broaden its contacts at the cantonal level to better address asylum issues and the local-integration needs of refugees.

In the **United Kingdom**, UNHCR has four major objectives: preserving space for asylum in a broader migration context; ensuring standards of protection in line with international norms and best practices; pursuing durable solutions; and seeking support for UNHCR from the United Kingdom.

Financial information

UNHCR activities in Western Europe have witnessed years of budgetary retrenchment, and exchange rate fluctuations which affected programme delivery. Many country operations have sought additional funds in order to exercise core mandate functions. Financial constraints have made it difficult to pursue other commitments such as age, gender and diversity mainstreaming.

In spite of serious budgetary limitations, UNHCR has reallocated resources to address protection challenges in countries affected by mixed migration flows, such as Malta and Greece.



Budget (USD)		
Countries	Annual budget	
	2008	2009
Austria	955,395	1,027,358
Belgium	3,553,431	5,377,870
France	2,603,133	2,741,533
Germany	2,383,557	2,079,598
Greece	1,112,951	1,065,579
Ireland	671,690	666,098
Italy	3,030,090	2,742,810
Malta	39,221	143,670
Portugal	45,000	85,653
Spain	929,701	947,402
Sweden	1,831,095	1,905,838
Switzerland	651,187	691,854
United Kingdom	1,644,736	1,421,307
Total	19,451,187	20,896,570