

Launch *Handbook on Immigration and Asylum in Ireland 2007*  
Statement by Manuel Jordao (UNHCR) at ESRI – 27 November 2008

I would like to express my thanks to the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) for inviting UNHCR today to launch this fine handbook. I know it will prove very useful to researchers and practitioners in the area of asylum and wider migration circles. This is exactly the sort of publication I looked for when I first arrived in Ireland in early 2006, though at no avail.

Having the honour to launch the *Handbook* today, I know I should be able to stand here and tell you all that I have read it assiduously from front cover to back cover, but I can't claim that. Instead, what I can say is that I have read parts I am familiar with from my own area of expertise and can say, the quality of the material in the *Handbook* is, as you would expect, excellent.

The ESRI has a well-deserved reputation for its quality research. What you produce is an invaluable commodity in today's world!

I have been working in Ireland for the last three years, but all of you will understand and recognize, much more than I can, how much Ireland has changed and will go on changing as part of the global world. The ESRI is an institute that has to ride this fast wave of constant change in an attempt to understand the economics of it and its social implications. Your challenge combines the real difficulty of scientifically identifying relevant indicators on the socio-economic landscape and reporting these in a useable way to enhance good policy making. It's a task I don't envy!

Your work is, therefore, of great interest to UNHCR, as indeed is the work you are undertaking as part of the National Network meeting here today and its work with the European Migration Network.

As you may know, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has been active in Europe since our inception in 1950. Indeed, the *raison d'être* of the agency in its first years was to solve the plight of European refugees after the Second World War.

Sixty-years later, we are still in Europe, but working here and elsewhere on many new assumptions with many new realities. We need only look to our work on displacement due to conflicts in Afghanistan, Georgia, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe to see the type of chaos that turns refugees into a true global problem today. Desperate people, from fear of the turmoil of war or the insufferable conditions that go hand in hand with it, leave their homes every day. Many take non-seaworthy boats to travel across the

Gulf of Aden, or the Mediterranean Sea, winding up dead on the shores of Yemen and Southern Europe.

After a five-year decline, for the second straight year, the numbers of refugees and conflict-generated internally displaced people grew to a total of 37.4 million in 2007 – some 11.4 million refugees outside their homelands and 26 million people forcibly displaced within their own countries.

Unfortunately, there are ominous signs that we are likely to see even more people displaced in the future. We are living in a world where many of the barriers to human mobility have fallen and new patterns of forced displacement have emerged as a result of conflicts that today may be motivated by politics, economic mismanagement, bad governance and a host of other factors, including climate-induced environmental degradation leading to competition for water and other resources.

Humanitarian agencies like UNHCR are increasingly being requested to get involved in a large variety of operations to assist refugees and internally displaced populations, such as in Darfur (Sudan), Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Yemen and Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, to name just a few.

In Europe, the continent that created the international protection regime, UNHCR is also involved in programs that try to ensure that States offer protection and durable solutions to some 1.7 million refugees; 2.3 million IDPs (within or on the periphery of the European continent) and 250,000 asylum-seekers. The challenge here is to guarantee that Europe will remain faithful to its humanitarian traditions and that the institution of asylum will be preserved in times that will continue to be marked by States' efforts to control the growing phenomena of illegal migration.

One significant danger of legitimate efforts by States to control their borders and the integrity of their systems is often their inability to make a proper distinction between people who choose to move and those who are forced to flee. From a point of view of promoting protection of forcibly displaced people, we must do the necessary to ensure that this is the exception and not the rule of Europe's borders.

The European Union is, of course, a very important partner for this element of our protection work. What the EU decides to do in the future will also have implications for how other countries operate their asylum systems worldwide.

In my humble opinion, the European Union has been an important driving force behind the build up of new asylum laws and jurisprudence. It will I believe continue

to be so, particularly should its members forge ahead to implement the recently adopted European Pact on Immigration and Asylum.

In the EU context, Ireland has been generally supportive of EU asylum Directives, of EU resettlement initiatives and of the process known as the "*first phase of harmonization of EU asylum policy*". Indeed, we have looked to Ireland for support when we have raised issues of concern in Europe, and we have received it.

In this policy atmosphere, UNHCR needs the expertise and indeed support of bodies such as the ESRI and networks working on asylum and migration issues. We rely on objective, reliable and up-to-date data as much as the main national policy-makers, to evaluate and respond to issues affecting the rights of refugees.

The *Handbook* is being launched today at a time when Ireland and other EU countries are tackling unprecedented challenges in migration, not to mention the global financial turmoil that has beset everyone. Economies in many countries are at a crossroads and shops, businesses and factories like never before, contain large immigrant workforces. This picture is as true of Ireland as in other places. How we respond will be crucial.

An additional feature of the current Irish context is the development of new legislation that provides for an overhauling of the asylum/migration systems. Among others, we expect that the new Act will transpose the key EU Directive on minimum standards on (asylum) procedures in order to guarantee access to the territory and protection to those fleeing persecution and serious harm. When the new legislation is given force, UNHCR will be ready to work with the asylum authorities in order to ensure that the quality of asylum decisions meet the highest possible EU standards in the years to come.

Having at hand a resource such as this *Handbook* will be invaluable. It shows in a very detailed and comprehensive manner the extraordinary developments in these areas in Ireland in the last few years and, indeed, of the relevant EU legislation and jurisprudence dealing with asylum and migration issues.

I launch the *Handbook* with great admiration for everyone who has been involved, including Frances McGinnity (ESRI) and Suzanne Egan in UCD (with whom our office has a long connection); its authors Emma Quinn, Corona Joyce, Phillip O'Connell and John Stanley.

Thank you.