



# Western Europe

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

## Recent developments

The number of asylum-seekers entering Western Europe from January to July 2003 was eleven per cent down on the same period in 2002, with Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland recording the sharpest falls. The United Kingdom also recorded a significant fall in the number of applications submitted. The number of asylum claims submitted by nationals from Afghanistan, Iraq, Serbia and Montenegro and Turkey continued to drop, while the number of applications from citizens of the Russian Federation increased.

Despite the considerable overall decrease in asylum applications, asylum remained one of the most difficult issues on the agenda of many EU Member States. On the one hand, many States reacted by initiating extensive legislative reforms in the areas of asylum and migration, accompanied by increasingly restrictive measures. On the other hand, States also engaged in intensive discussion on how to enhance protection in regions of origin of refugees and asylum-seekers.

New legislative and policy proposals were introduced, *inter alia*, in Austria, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. UNHCR sought to provide expert input in all these countries. The



Office also continued to contribute actively to negotiations on the harmonisation of asylum law and policy at the European Union level. In UNHCR's view, a coherent, Europe-wide asylum system would benefit both refugees and European States, not least through the possibilities that it would provide for better management of asylum and migration issues. UNHCR notes, however, that several Directives (some already in force, others under negotiation) may fail to set appropriate minimum standards, insofar as they rely extensively on optional provisions, exceptions and derogations. Of concern, in particular, are the Qualification Directive and the Asylum Procedure Directive, which risk undermining agreed principles of international refugee and human rights law, as well as general administrative law.

UNHCR has welcomed and participated in the new policy debate on improving protection in regions of origin. Several strands of the debate align themselves naturally with objectives expressed within the Agenda for Protection and the Convention Plus Initiative. UNHCR is working with the Commission and a number of EU Member States to explore how such discussions could be taken further in possible pilot projects.

By means of regular discussions and provision of country of origin information, UNHCR has sought to support efforts by States to encourage the return of persons

not in need of international protection. Given protection concerns that may arise in the context of return to Afghanistan, a number of Western European States signed Tripartite agreements (i.e. signed by country of origin, country of asylum and UNHCR) on the repatriation and return of Afghan nationals. Preliminary consultations were held on a framework for returns to Iraq, although events unfolding there made early large-scale returns unlikely.

In 2003, European States renewed their efforts to cooperate in the areas of migration management and control, and negotiated a number of readmission agreements across the Mediterranean region. Given that persons in need of international protection are generally part of larger flows of irregular migrants, such measures raised concerns on the part of UNHCR as to safety, prompt identification, and access to an asylum procedure.

## Strategic objectives

In line with the updated Strategic Directions (2002-2004) for the Europe region, UNHCR in Western Europe has focused on 1) preserving asylum systems commensurate with the principles of international refugee and human rights law; and 2) securing support for UNHCR activities worldwide.



The main objectives of UNHCR in Western Europe in 2004 are: ensuring that asylum-seekers have access to safety and to procedures, at borders and elsewhere, under which their claims are heard fairly and promptly, in line with international standards and practices; promoting an inclusive interpretation of the 1951 Refugee Convention and related principles, in line with UNHCR doctrine; encouraging Western European governments to ensure that EU asylum harmonisation takes place at the highest level of refugee protection standards; and ensuring that UNHCR's standing, as the international authority on refugee protection, is understood and acknowledged. In this regard, UNHCR hopes to work with States on rebuilding confidence in the asylum process, and to contribute to approaches that ensure respect for the principles of international refugee law, while at the same time meeting the need for efficiency. It will also continue to build its partnership with States in addressing problems at the interface between asylum and irregular migration.



Greece: Afghan mother and child – asylum-seekers in a reception centre in Tendeli, Attika.  
UNHCR / T. Katechis

## Operations

### Harmonisation of European asylum policy

In 2004, UNHCR's focus will be on the incorporation into national law of EU directives adopted under the asylum and migration agenda. At the time of publication, it is expected that by the end of 2003 the EU will have adopted the Qualification Directive (identifying refugees and persons in need of complementary or subsidiary protection and outlining their rights), as well as the Directive on asylum procedures. In early 2003, the EU adopted a Directive on Reception of Asylum-Seekers and a Regulation on determining the State responsible for examining an asylum claim. UNHCR has expressed its concerns, firstly, about the level of harmonisation which will result from these new directives, and, more fundamentally, about the disappointing standards being set. These standards are, in certain instances, failing to conform to long-standing principles of international refugee and human rights law, or general administrative law. UNHCR has always argued that harmonisation policy

drawn up from a migration control perspective will run the risk of detracting from attention to a refugee's need for protection.

### Strengthened asylum systems

UNHCR will continue to work with a number of States, that are seeking to revise their national asylum and migration systems, by providing expert input and advice as to how such systems could be made more efficient while respecting principles of fairness. The Office will promote increased co-operation on returns and repatriation, which will result, *inter alia*, in the conclusion of a number of Tripartite Agreements. The Office also plans to pursue ongoing discussions on possible pilot projects aimed at improving international protection in regions of origin, thereby decreasing pressures for irregular onward movement. Another area of focus for the organisation will be to work with States in developing

migration management and control measures which respect fully the right to seek asylum. At the same time, UNHCR hopes to contribute to efforts to improve the integration of persons in need of international protection in host societies.

### Public information, advocacy and partnerships

In Western Europe, there is considerable hostility towards asylum-seekers and refugees. Alleged abuse of asylum remains a hot media topic in a number of Western European countries. Despite the competing demands of the Iraq situation on UNHCR's media and external relations staff in the past year, the Office will in 2004 continue to seek to develop a powerful information strategy aimed simultaneously at policy makers and the population at large. In each of the countries of the region, UNHCR's promotional and advocacy activities will focus on ensuring access to territory and to asylum procedures, adequate reception standards for asylum-seekers, and effective integration of refugees.

### Resource mobilisation

UNHCR cannot function without adequate support. Many European States provide generous funding for UNHCR's refugee protection and assistance programmes throughout the world. Unfortunately, despite this support, UNHCR has been under-funded in recent years. In Western Europe, therefore, UNHCR will have to continue to pursue vigorously both public and private sector fundraising activities. New approaches, designed to improve protection in regions of origin, will require increased support from development actors as well.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Austria	1,580,949
Belgium	2,470,616
France	1,892,706
Germany	1,571,810
Greece	1,037,600
Ireland	511,168
Italy	1,478,737
Malta	51,000
Netherlands	103,199
Portugal	64,600
Spain	787,969
Sweden	1,451,853
Switzerland	710,106
United Kingdom	1,308,548
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,020,861</b>