

Western Europe

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

Recent Developments

During the first six months of 2002, some 183,000 persons applied for asylum in Western European countries. This represents an overall increase of three per cent over the same period in 2001. The number of applications rose in France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, but decreased in Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands. Iraq remained the leading country of origin (though there were fewer Iraqi applicants than in 2001), followed by Afghanistan, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Turkey.

In the second quarter of 2002, however, asylum applications by Afghan nationals began to show a sharp downturn, at the same time as European governments, separately and jointly, started designing programmes for assisted voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan. UNHCR proposed tripartite frameworks for these programmes (the three parties



being the country of origin, the country of asylum, and UNHCR) in order to place repatriation within a framework of protection and humanitarian principles. To date, France and the United Kingdom have availed themselves of the offer. No large-scale repatriation of Afghans from Europe is expected, however, until the spring of 2003.

Heightened security concerns in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, coupled with the continued growth in human smuggling and trafficking, were no doubt motives for the intensified preoccupation with migration control demonstrated by Western European governments. In a few countries, anti-immigrant sentiments ran high during election campaigns and some populist political leaders indulged in negative stereotyping and denigration of asylum-seekers.

Legislative developments in the asylum and/or migration field were many and diverse, reflecting a

wide spectrum of approaches to the management of migration and asylum flows, from restrictive to relatively liberal. Major legislative amendments were passed, introduced or announced in Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Although these developments coincide with the pursuit of the EU harmonisation agenda, they do not always achieve the goal of drawing national policies closer together. Substantial differences persist among the asylum laws and practices of EU Member States, a factor contributing to the phenomenon of secondary movement of asylum-seekers within Europe. In June 2002, UNHCR offered to assist the Governments of France and the United Kingdom in resolving the problem of irregular cross-Channel movements via the Sangatte reception centre on the French coast. Subsequently, the French Government asked UNHCR to carry out an operation in Sangatte,

which should facilitate the closure of the centre in early 2003 and solutions for its inhabitants.

Strategic Objectives

The updated version of the Strategic Directions (2002-2004) for the Europe region takes into account changes in UNHCR's working environment, operational progress and constraints, the High Commissioner's priorities, the outcome of UNHCR's Global Consultations and the need to implement the Agenda for Protection. The document acknowledges Western Europe's dual responsibility: as a region offering durable asylum to large numbers of refugees, and as a key provider of political and financial support to UNHCR and to refugees worldwide.

In Western Europe, UNHCR will simultaneously explore several inter-connected paths towards improved international protection for refugees. The Office will, in particular, advocate: effective management of mixed population movements into the region; rebuilding trust and confidence in asylum systems; sustained efforts to combat xenophobia and intolerance of refugees and asylum-seekers; expanding the pool of resettlement countries; European countries' support for institution and capacity-building measures to strengthen refugee protection in countries of first asylum; and increased, predictable and flexible funding.

Operations

Harmonisation of European Asylum Policy

The institutions and Member States of the European Union have been at work on the harmonisation agenda since the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999. In early 2002, the European Commission issued two modified legislative proposals concerning family reunion and asylum procedures. There is continued concern that the momentum of harmonisation can be dissipated by Member States' preoccupation with maintaining their existing domestic legislation and policy priorities. Despite the efforts made by the Seville Summit of EU Heads of State and Governments in June 2002, to give renewed urgency and impetus to the harmonisation process,



United Kingdom: Enhanced border controls – Immigration officials searching trucks for illegal immigrants at Dover in Kent. UNHCR / A. Johnstone

as this Global Appeal goes to press, the only instrument finalised in 2002 – a Directive on minimum standards for the reception of asylum-seekers – has not yet been formally adopted. On the other hand, work has been progressing on the crucial draft Directive on refugee status and subsidiary forms of protection. One of UNHCR's key activities in Europe has been, and will remain, the provision of expert advice and comments, both in Brussels and in EU capitals, on legislative proposals. This activity will take on added significance in 2003, as negotiations are expected to speed up with a view to completion of the first phase of harmonisation by May 2004, the date set by the Amsterdam Treaty.

Strengthened Asylum Systems

Western European governments have understandable concerns about what they see as the uncontrolled growth of migration. In this context, UNHCR's primary challenge is to preserve the institution of asylum and to ensure that effective protection is provided to those people who need it, while taking into account the legitimate concerns of States about the increase in human smuggling and trafficking. The real and perceived misuse of asylum systems by non-refugees must also be addressed. UNHCR has put forward a number of specific proposals to the EU in this respect, which will be pursued throughout 2003. These include measures to restore the credibility of asylum systems, such as an effective mechanism for the return of unsuccessful asylum applicants, and a simplified appeal procedure to be available when asylum claims are judged at first instance to be manifestly unfounded. UNHCR's advocacy and legal advice activities in each of the Western

European countries will concentrate on access to territory and to asylum procedures, reception standards and integration of refugees. In this context, a priority for UNHCR will be to monitor border crossing points more frequently and to seek evidence of the enhancement of reception standards and a clear shared understanding of “best interest” solutions for separated children seeking asylum in Europe. Within an environment strongly influenced by the determination to combat terrorist action, UNHCR will work closely with States to ensure that measures taken to fight terrorism strike a proper balance between national security and refugee protection. UNHCR will also actively pursue the durable solutions of resettlement to, and voluntary repatriation from Western Europe. In the latter area, UNHCR will promote its recent experience of tripartite frameworks for voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan.

Public Information, Advocacy and Partnerships

The experience of many asylum-seekers and refugees in European countries is often one of profound distress. The host community may be less than welcoming, seeing them as a threat to social stability, jobs, cultural identity, and a strain on public services. Asylum-seekers are frequently targeted as “undesirable aliens”, through ignorance compounded by misinformation. A powerful public information strategy therefore remains central to UNHCR’s protection objectives in Europe. A better understanding of, and support for refugees and asylum-seekers will, in the first instance, stem from accurate and up-to-date information on how many people are in need of protection, where that protection is being provided, and in what form. A fuller human picture will help reduce the incidence of xenophobia and restore the image of refugees as potentially useful contributors to a pluralist society. UNHCR’s public information activities and networking will seek to involve the refugees and asylum-seekers themselves, capitalising on the kind of momentum achieved by the campaign entitled “The Refugee Perspective” launched under the umbrella of UNHCR’s Global Consultations on International Protection. UNHCR will focus its partnerships with, among others, ECRE and the Council of Europe, on the joint development of refugee associations and networks of refugee youth leaders.

Resource Mobilisation

Adequate support from Western European governments is essential if UNHCR is to carry out its mandate. Many European States provide generous funding for UNHCR’s protection and assistance programmes throughout the world. Unfortunately, this support does not meet UNHCR’s needs. UNHCR offices in Europe will therefore continue to reach out to European governments, parliaments and regional organisations. UNHCR will also seek to broaden its donor base through a more consistent and results-oriented strategy for private and corporate sector fund raising. There is a need for increased political and financial support for UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation and reintegration programmes, as well as local integration activities that involve refugees as agents of development. These programmes should be seen not only in terms of achieving durable solutions to refugee problems, but also reducing the desperation that drives refugees and asylum-seekers into Europe in the first place. UNHCR’s message to European governments is clear: Europe’s asylum problem cannot be solved in Europe alone, and the best way to address it is to invest creatively in resolving the refugee crisis worldwide

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Austria	1,503,753
Belgium	2,212,918
France	1,707,421
Germany	2,155,319
Greece	972,887
Ireland	426,418
Italy	1,468,425
Malta	146,300
Netherlands	266,523
Portugal	104,100
Spain	868,339
Sweden	1,259,080
Switzerland	660,597
United Kingdom	1,148,765
Total	14,900,845