

# UNHCR BO London

## Country Operations Plan 2003

### Part I: Executive Committee Summary

#### ***Context and Themes***

As outlined in the White Paper on Asylum and Immigration: "Secure Borders, Safe Haven," introduced in February 2002, the Government's aim over the next few years is to broadly move from migration control to "migration management". Much of this is based on the recognition by the Home Office that in order to lessen the heavy burden on the asylum system, the migration-asylum nexus merits careful attention. Positive developments which aim to do this, include a move towards the relaxation of immigration policies in order to develop the UK workforce, and a proposal to introduce a formal resettlement scheme with UNHCR.

A similar relaxation in the asylum policy will be highly unlikely. The asylum debate has been dominated during the past years by frequent demands for reform of a system that was perceived to be failing those in need of international protection, while remaining a "soft touch" and open to abuse by others. This view is strongly reflected in the White Paper, which will be the blue-print for the drafting of the fourth major piece of asylum legislation in under ten years. The White Paper envisions, *inter alia*, the strengthening of deterrent measures such as an increase in the detention estate, including the detention of children and families; deployment of more Airlines Liaison Officers overseas to prevent entry into the UK of certain categories of persons; repeal of Part III of the Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999, which guaranteed automatic bail hearings for asylum-seekers held in detention; and the introduction of a statutory closure date to prevent multiple adjournments of cases at the appellate level. The government will also enhance its efforts to increase the number of rejected asylum-seekers removed from the UK.

The following trends can also be surmised from the contents of the White Paper:

- Renewed importance will be placed by the UK on EU harmonisation as a means, *inter alia*, of sharing the burden of asylum in Europe.
- The policy of dispersing asylum-seekers away from London is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. This means that sufficient capacity needs to be developed in the dispersal areas to provide proper material and legal assistance to asylum-seekers, and to offer credible integration options for recognised refugees. The variety of social problems which have resulted from the dispersal policy – the most vivid example being serious physical violence directed at asylum-seekers – need to be dealt with in a comprehensive and community-based manner.
- Asylum determination both at the first and appellate instances is likely to be numbers-driven to the detriment of a fair asylum process.

It is expected that xenophobia and hostility towards foreigners will remain in evidence, and that race relations will remain a significant issue despite government initiatives.

The media will remain receptive to negative news stories and will continue to include asylum issues within an anti-immigration agenda. Reporting will continue to prefer a parochial approach with relatively little coverage of international issues.