

**RO Belgium
(Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands
and the European Institutions)**

**COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN
2003**

Executive Committee Summary

(a) *Context and Beneficiary Population(s)*

The principal objectives of UNHCR's Regional Office (RO) in Brussels are to ensure respect for refugee protection principles both nationally, at the level of the three Benelux countries (Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) and, more generally, in the European Union's (EU) process of harmonizing its asylum laws and policies. The RO also seeks to gain political and financial support for UNHCR concerns, programmes and operations world-wide and manages all aspects of UNHCR's donor relations and resource mobilization with the European Institutions.

Protection in the Benelux countries

RO Brussels seeks to promote a positive protection environment for asylum-seekers and refugees in the three Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) through the provision of advice on asylum and refugee protection issues, as well as through advocacy, training, monitoring and selective legal interventions in individual cases, notably those of a precedent-setting nature. It also seeks to strengthen relations with the national NGO sector. Each of the Benelux countries has a different operational environment and this increases the complexity of the RO's work.

The harmonization of European Union asylum policies

Through its involvement in the harmonisation process, UNHCR aims to ensure that EU asylum policy adheres to standards of international refugee law and that EU asylum practice is in accordance with UNHCR principles. RO Brussels coordinates UNHCR's work with the European Institutions (Commission, Council, Parliament and Presidency) in relation to the harmonisation of asylum policies within the framework of the Amsterdam Treaty. Having entered into force on 1 May 1999, the Treaty sets a five-year time frame (1999 – 2004) for the development of a number of EU-wide binding instruments on substantive and procedural asylum law. RO also prepares and disseminates positions on the EU harmonization process to UNHCR offices in EU capitals and coordinates advocacy strategies amongst these offices.

EU enlargement

RO collaborates closely with the European Institutions on asylum-related aspects of the EU enlargement process. It seeks to promote the establishment of fair and effective asylum systems in the applicant States and to ensure that UNHCR concerns are factored into EU programmes and budgets for the region. It also assists UNHCR's offices in Central Europe to identify funding and other support for the strengthening of asylum systems in Central European countries. Moreover, RO Brussels monitors and provides inputs into the increasing cooperation in asylum and

migration matters between the EU and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and – to a lesser extent - the Mediterranean basin.

Separated Children in Europe

In 1998, UNHCR and International Save the Children Alliance (Alliance) established a joint project to promote the rights of the increasing number of separated children coming to or travelling across Europe. UNHCR participation in the project has been administered by RO Brussels. The Programme has achieved its objective and will be discontinued in its present form at the end of 2002. Implementation of programmes for separated children will continue at the national level.

Donor relations with the European Institutions

Since late 1999, RO Brussels is responsible for the management of all donor relations and resource mobilization with the European Institutions. Its responsibilities in this regard include the strengthening of overall partnership, the identification of funding opportunities and – in close liaison with UNHCR Field Offices and HQs Desks - the negotiation of contributions, the management of funding submissions and contracts, and reporting on funds received. RO Brussels represents UNHCR in negotiations between the United Nations and the Commission on framework agreements governing UN-EC co-operation. It also seeks to influence the humanitarian aid agenda of the European Institutions (notably the Commission and Parliament) in relation to refugee concerns.

Other External Relations

In addition, the Regional Office plays a variety of external relations roles in connection with a wide range of Brussels-based processes and institutions of crucial importance to UNHCR. In particular, the RO provides inputs into EU efforts to develop comprehensive approaches to refugee crises through strengthened partnership with countries of origin and transit of asylum-seekers.

(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

Theme 1: Strengthening asylum in a uniting Europe

Main Goal(s):

1. Persons in need of international protection will be allowed access to the territories of European States. They will also have access to fair, efficient and effective asylum procedures and be treated in accordance with international protection standards.
2. States will develop, and gradually harmonize asylum systems in conformity with international standards;
3. Public opinion will be receptive to the protection needs of refugees and supportive of their integration efforts.

Principal Objectives

1. To ensure that harmonized European instruments on asylum and refugees meet relevant international standards.
2. To ensure that national legislation and practice in Benelux countries are in conformity with international protection standards.

3. To promote standards and good practice in relation to separated children seeking asylum in Europe.
4. To ensure that public opinion is receptive to the protection needs of refugees.

Related Outputs

1. Instruments adopted and other measures taken in the context of the EU harmonization process reflect international protection standards.
2. Asylum-seekers have the possibility to effectively exercise in Benelux countries the right to seek asylum, and their claims are considered in an impartial, fair and efficient manner.
3. Refugees in Benelux countries are treated in accordance with international protection standards.
4. The needs of separated children are appropriately reflected, at national and EU levels, in both legislative dispositions and administrative practices.
5. A better understanding of the protection needs of refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe is created amongst the media and public at large.

Theme 2: Partnership with Europe

Main Goal(s):

1. European Governments, regional organizations and private individuals/corporations will increase their financial support to UNHCR operations;
2. The European people will give more and better informed support to UNHCR and to refugees;
3. States and regional organizations will actively uphold UNHCR's protection and assistance concerns and actively seek solutions to refugee problems internationally.

Principal Objectives

1. To ensure that EC/EU funding of UNHCR's operations is at a level and of a form commensurate with the activities the Office has been mandated to carry out.
2. To ensure that refugee concerns and problems of displacement are given appropriate priority by the European institutions.
3. To mobilize public opinion in favour of humanitarian action for the benefit of refugees world-wide.

Related Outputs

1. EC funding to UNHCR will be provided in a predictable, timely and appropriately flexible manner, covering in principle the whole range of UNHCR's mandated activities including protection, assistance and support to durable solutions.
2. Through a process of advocacy and active engagement, UNHCR concerns will be reflected in the priorities, policies and external action of the Brussels-based institutions.
3. Through work with the media and public awareness initiatives, a better understanding will be created of the needs of refugees and the work of UNHCR world-wide.