

# WESTERN EUROPE

## Regional Overview

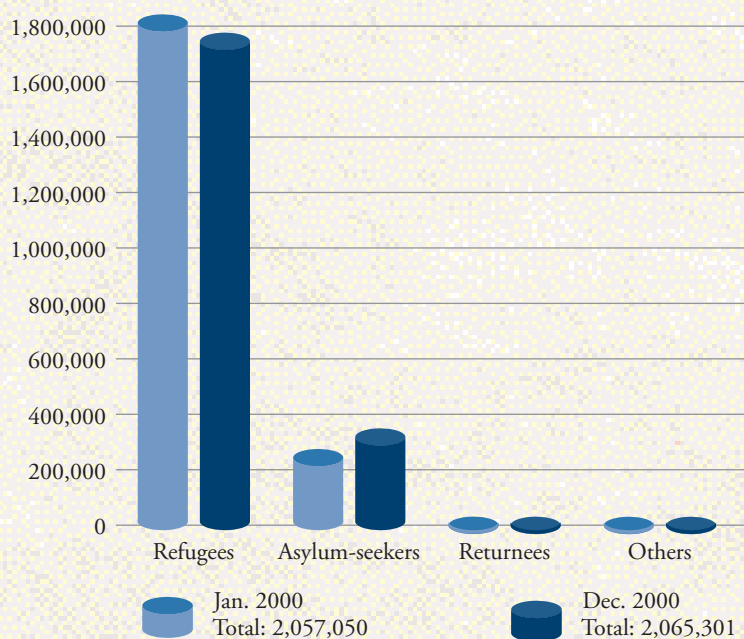
Belgium • Cyprus • Denmark • Finland • France • Germany • Greece • Iceland • Ireland • Italy • Liechtenstein • Luxembourg • Malta • Monaco • Netherlands • Norway • Portugal • San Marino • Spain • Sweden • Switzerland • Turkey • United Kingdom



## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

In Western Europe the year 2000 was characterised by three major interrelated developments with a direct bearing on UNHCR's protection activities. The first was the acceleration of the European integration process, particularly with regard to the enlargement of the European Union, which entered into a new phase of negotiations with candidate countries. The second was the very noticeable return of legal immigration to the Western European political agenda, with discussion focusing almost exclusively on the demographics of labour, i.e. economic necessity. The third was the commitment of Member States of the European Union to the development of a common asylum system.

## Persons of Concern to UNHCR



Western European governments showed increasing readiness to co-operate with UNHCR on subjects of common interest, including the asylum dimension of

European enlargement, the interface between asylum and migration, the root causes of humanitarian crises, the provision of humanitarian aid, and solutions to protracted refugee situations. New models of co-operation between governments and UNHCR were established, such as the Nordic Baltic Consultative Committee, which was set up at the beginning of the year to bring together UNHCR and key senior government and NGO officials from the Nordic and Baltic region. This forum functioned as a steering committee, co-ordinating outreach activities throughout the region. It enabled UNHCR to work with partners to commemorate its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and laid the foundations for similar co-operation in 2001 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Convention, and also on the Global Consultations on International Protection. Furthermore, it generated public awareness about UNHCR's operations worldwide.

An exchange of letters in July 2000 between the Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs of the European Commission and the High Commissioner signalled even closer co-operation on asylum and its multifaceted challenges. Following the entry into force in 1999 of the Amsterdam Treaty, in 2000 the European Commission issued two legislative proposals with regard to asylum, namely a directive on minimum standards for granting temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of refugees and another on minimum standards to govern the asylum procedure. In so doing, the European Commission drew political guidance from the conclusions of the Tampere Summit in late 1999, which call for the development of a common asylum system. The European Commission also tabled two key policy documents requested by the Tampere European Council: one on the mechanics and implications of a common asylum procedure and uniform refugee status throughout the European Union, and another on the prospects for a common immigration policy in the European Union. UNHCR contributed to the preparation of both documents. All of these legislative proposals and policy documents are of crucial importance to UNHCR, not only because of the Office's preoccupation with European asylum policy, but also because of their relevance for global refugee protection standards.

There were altogether 452,350 asylum applicants in Western Europe in 2000 (roughly 20,000 fewer than in 1999). The geographic pattern remained unchanged, with northern Europe remaining the main destination for asylum-seekers. The largest number of asylum claims were received in Germany (including re-opened applications), the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France. The number of asylum applications

declined considerably in Switzerland (by 61.7 per cent) and southern Europe (Spain by 16 per cent and Italy by 46 per cent). Former Yugoslavia remained the main country of origin of asylum-seekers, although the numbers declined from 115,850 in 1999 to 42,250 in 2000 (a 63.5 per cent decrease). Other major countries of origin were Iraq (8.4 per cent), Afghanistan (seven per cent), Iran (6.6 per cent) and Turkey (5.7 per cent). Asylum applications rose significantly from the Russian Federation (by 32 per cent), China (by 20 per cent) and India (by 33.8 per cent).

## CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

An ever-increasing number of people are on the move in search of better opportunities in Western Europe, and asylum-seekers are often intermingled with them. The media spotlight on illegal immigration and human trafficking has stirred up xenophobic tendencies. This creates a climate hostile towards those seeking asylum from persecution, often in fear of their lives. This unfavourable environment has tended to foil the efforts by Western European countries to find the right balance between the control of migration and the protection of refugees. In such circumstances, UNHCR's primary challenge has been to preserve the institution of asylum and to ensure that effective international protection is provided to those who need it.

Against this background, UNHCR carried out a strategic planning exercise in early 2000, whereby the overarching priorities in Western Europe were identified as promoting quality of asylum in a uniting Europe and increasing Europe's support for refugees and UNHCR worldwide. A document, *Strategic Directions 2000-2005*, was issued. It outlines UNHCR's vision, goals and objectives in Europe and discusses UNHCR's added value in the region. In terms of promoting quality of asylum, UNHCR remains concerned that the pressure exerted by public opinion on Western European governments is undermining efforts to bring about improvements to asylum legislation and practice. States continue to deter illegal immigration, without sufficient measures to mitigate the impact on refugees and asylum-seekers.

## OPERATIONS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

During 2000, there were encouraging developments at the national level on key elements of interpretation of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. The notion

of “persecution”, as contained in the definition of a refugee, was given a less restrictive interpretation in the laws of France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland. This will address the protection needs of many asylum-seekers.

The interface between migration and asylum has been an area of major concern to UNHCR. In an attempt to contribute creatively to the development of comprehensive responses to migration and refugee problems, an internal working group on migration and asylum was established in June at the request of the High Commissioner. The overall objective of the working group was to conduct a comprehensive review of the migration-asylum nexus and to formulate a set of recommendations on ways and means of safeguarding and strengthening the institution of asylum in the face of migratory pressures. It is anticipated that a consultative process based on these recommendations will engage interested governments and relevant international organisations.

The reception of asylum-seekers has been another area of deep concern for UNHCR. In July, UNHCR published a comprehensive study on the reception of asylum-seekers in the 15 Member States of the European Union. The study, which was conducted in the context of European Union harmonisation, identifies general trends in the reception policies and practices of Member States, covering areas ranging from the conditions in which asylum-seekers find themselves immediately upon arrival, to how the provision of the basic necessities of life is managed during the status determination process, as well as asylum-seekers’ access to health care, education and employment opportunities. The study put forward a set of recommendations based on

existing State practice but guided by basic principles of international human rights law.

In a number of Western European countries increased attention has been focused on the reception of asylum-seekers and the integration of recognised refugees. A new reception centre was opened at Lisbon airport. Here asylum-seekers are held while their applications are examined; living conditions are acceptable, but their freedom of movement is restricted. A similar new reception centre was opened at Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris. The Government of the United Kingdom has reacted positively to UNHCR’s concerns by issuing a blueprint document on the integration of refugees. Special measures have been adopted to allow refugee doctors to requalify and work in the United Kingdom.

A groundbreaking tripartite agreement was signed between the Italian Interior Minister, the Association of Italian Municipalities and UNHCR. It will help meet the social needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in Italy. Given the increasingly decentralised administrative system in Italy, the involvement of local government in the provision of assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees represents a considerable improvement. According to the agreement, UNHCR’s role is to plan, set standards and co-ordinate assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees.

Significant progress was made in the implementation of the Separated Children in Europe Programme. This aims to improve and harmonise legislation, policy and practice on separated children in need of international protection. During 2000, the Programme published two important reports: *Separated Children Coming to Western Europe: Why They Travel and How They Arrive*, and *Separated Children*



*Seeking Asylum in Europe: A Programme for Action.* The latter report is based on comparative assessments carried out in 17 Western European countries (EU countries plus Norway and Switzerland) and contains detailed recommendations for action at the national and European Union level. Many of these recommendations are also applicable to the Central and Eastern European countries. In addition, the Separated Children in Europe Programme issued an updated edition of the *Statement of Good Practice*, which proved a very useful reference document for governments, NGOs and others concerned with the rights of separated children. By the end of the year, preparations were underway to publish a comprehensive training guide based on the *Statement of Good Practice* to facilitate the advocacy work of NGOs dealing with asylum-seekers and separated children in the various European countries.

## FUNDING

The level of financial contributions from Western European States to UNHCR was not as high as had been hoped. Some willingness to increase contributions was signalled by various countries during visits to European capitals by the High Commissioner towards the end of the year. Although efforts to raise funds from the private sector achieved encouraging results in 2000, they did not attract as much financial support as in 1999, a year characterised by major humanitarian crises.

Financial constraints prevented UNHCR from carrying out promotional and training activities in a more systematic and comprehensive manner and from devoting sufficient energy to finding new partnerships with NGOs (or renewing established ones).

Voluntary Contributions - Restricted (USD)			
Donor	Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Annual Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution
Belgium	Belgium	93,458	93,458
France	France	960,731	960,731
Spain	Spain	127,999	127,999
Switzerland	Switzerland	100,320	100,320
United States of America	Turkey	700,000	700,000
Benetton (ITA)	Italy	22,336	22,336
Private Donors United States of America	Turkey	75	75
<b>Total<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>2,004,919</b>	<b>2,004,919</b>

<sup>1</sup>For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

<sup>2</sup>Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unearmarked voluntary contributions, broadly earmarked contributions, opening balances and adjustments.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised Budget	Expenditure
	Annual Programme Budget	
Belgium	2,131,250	1,787,638
Cyprus	407,888	406,080
France	2,462,582	2,233,194
Germany <sup>1</sup>	1,948,651	1,685,900
Greece	1,293,646	1,266,479
Ireland	282,251	208,323
Italy <sup>2</sup>	2,336,597	2,093,900
Malta	198,543	195,664
Netherlands	228,087	186,520
Portugal	113,664	111,535
Spain	1,432,614	1,308,488
Sweden	1,092,414	1,091,368
Switzerland	760,773	658,784
Turkey	5,270,405	5,176,644
United Kingdom	1,527,568	1,458,697
Bureau at Headquarters	1,002,780	1,009,905
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,489,713</b>	<b>20,879,119</b>

<sup>1</sup> Does not include costs related to "South-Eastern Europe Operations" amounting to USD 59,109.

<sup>2</sup> Does not include costs related to "South-Eastern Europe Operations" amounting to USD 114,326.