

# Western Europe

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

During the first eight months of 2000, more than 240,000 asylum claims were lodged in Western Europe (EU, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland), somewhat fewer than during the same period of 1999. Germany and the United Kingdom continue to receive more claims than any other European country. The main country of origin remained the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, although it gradually accounted for proportionally fewer applications than over the previous year. New patterns have started to emerge, with a growing number of Chinese and Pakistani nationals entering asylum systems in Western Europe. Over the past few years, the sheer numbers of new arrivals have on occasion overwhelmed the eligibility systems of certain countries, creating a massive backlog of claims. The numbers have also sorely tested the capacity of existing reception facilities. As a result, several Western European governments showed a growing reluctance to bear the cost of their asylum systems.

Despite perceptions to the contrary, refugees are returning to their countries of origin. For example, the vast majority of two very large recent refugee groups – from Bosnia and





Herzegovina, and Kosovo – have now returned. Most of the others have been successfully integrated locally, or resettled elsewhere, and UNHCR is working with European governments to find humane, principled solutions for the few remaining.

Western European countries are increasingly acknowledging the link between asylum and migration. Discussions are underway on how to devise an immigration policy, which will address the European demographic situation (especially the need for imported labour), so as to relieve the pressure on asylum channels. Meanwhile, European governments are increasingly committed to crack down on human smuggling and trafficking, which recently resulted in a series of tragic accidents, sparking off a heated debate on immigration and asylum.

Following the decision of the Tampere Summit of the European Council (October 1999) to work towards the establishment of a common European asylum system, the European Commission has proposed several legislative instruments that should form the basis for such a system, in the short term. As of October 2000, a European Refugee Fund had been established and three more proposals were under discussion among the Member States of the European Union, namely Council Directives on family reunification, temporary protection, and standards for asylum procedures.

## Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's strategy for Western Europe in 2001 will be articulated around two main themes: preserving the quality of asylum in Europe and increasing support for refugees and UNHCR world-wide. There is widespread and growing concern over irregular immigration, the smuggling of migrants, trafficking in people, and abuse of asylum procedures. The main challenge ahead for UNHCR is therefore to ensure that harmonisation of the asylum systems within the framework of the Amsterdam Treaty of the European Union preserves the quality of asylum in Europe. That treaty upholds international protection principles and is therefore an agreement that high standards of asylum must remain available in a continent which is becoming increasingly integrated. This, in UNHCR's view, will require action at the legal and institutional level, backed up by advocacy of the Office's mandate in a manner most likely to raise awareness and bring public opinion on board. Support for NGOs will remain crucial in respect of legal and social counselling, the integration of refugees and, where applicable, counselling prior to voluntary repatriation. Partnerships will be central to UNHCR's asylum strategy, not only with NGOs, but also with EU and other European institutions and intergovernmental forums, as well as the media.

UNHCR will also elicit increased European political and donor support for refugees and for its activities world-wide. The reduction in funding from the European Commission and the low level of funding received from some European countries, despite their prosperity, has led to a situation whereby the total contribution of European governments barely funds UNHCR operations within Europe. UNHCR requires more consistent and solid political and financial support in pursuing ever more complex operations in other continents. The politically charged debate on immigration and asylum underlines the need to make the facts about refugees better known - their circumstances and their dilemmas - and to strive for a more informed and supportive European public, both for refugees in Europe and for the plight of refugees globally.

## Operations

### Asylum

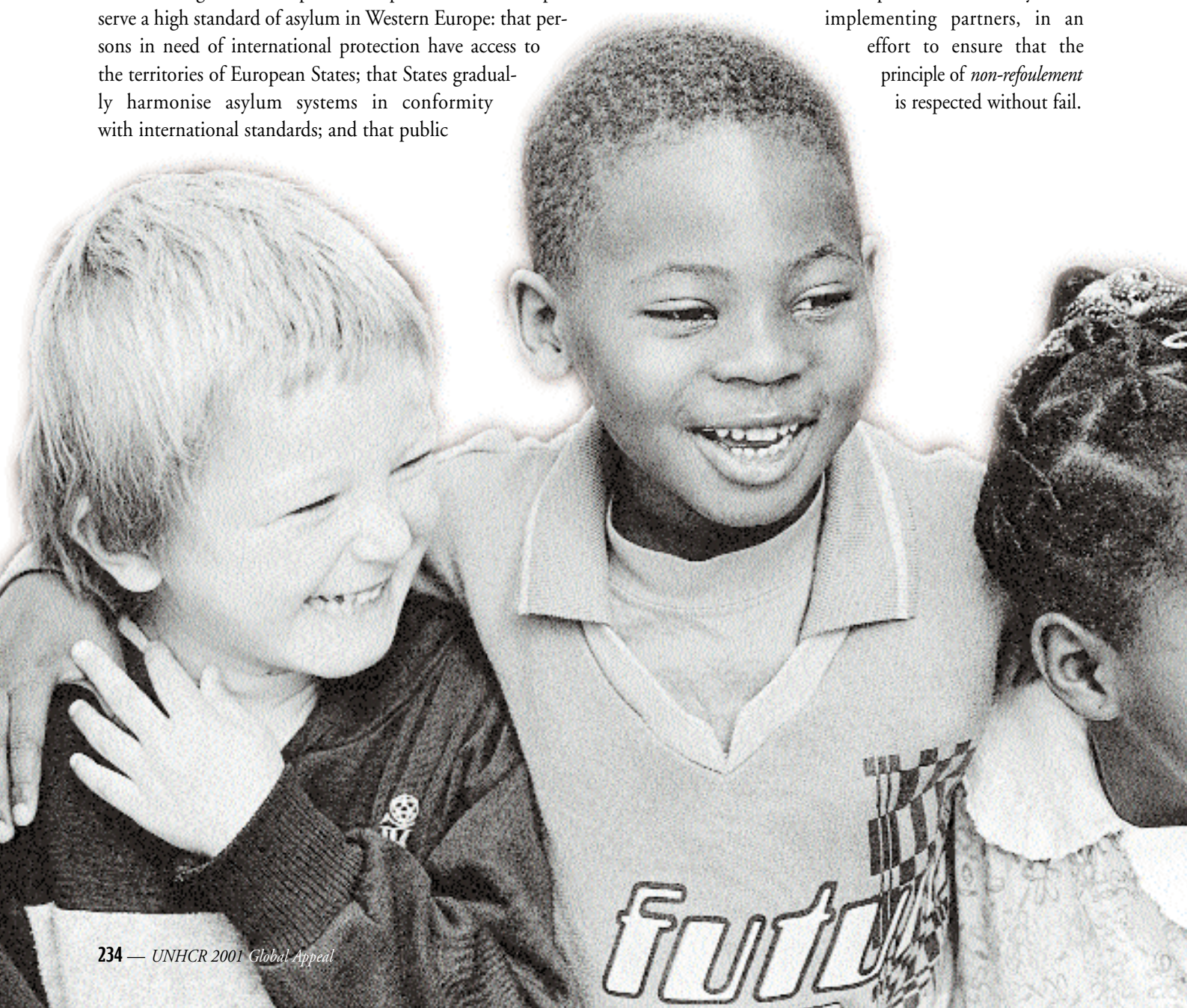
Three main goals will be pursued in parallel in order to preserve a high standard of asylum in Western Europe: that persons in need of international protection have access to the territories of European States; that States gradually harmonise asylum systems in conformity with international standards; and that public

opinion is receptive to refugees' needs and supportive of their efforts to integrate.

### Access

In order to ensure continued access for asylum-seekers to the territories of Western European States, UNHCR and its partners will advocate developments in policy, legislation and practice that make a clear distinction between *bona fide* asylum-seekers and economic migrants. UNHCR will monitor the adoption and implementation of measures to combat illegal migration and ensure that adequate safeguards against *refoulement* are in place. UNHCR will try to steer a course that takes into account both the States' concerns over illegal migration and refugees' legitimate expectations of access to international protection. In this connection, UNHCR will also support States in developing return policies that take into account both these concerns and expectations.

In southern Europe, as well as at airports throughout the region, UNHCR will monitor the arrival of asylum-seekers and their actual reception, either directly or via implementing partners, in an effort to ensure that the principle of *non-refoulement* is respected without fail.



### *Asylum Systems*

The main priority for UNHCR in southern Europe will be to strengthen and harmonise asylum systems not only to improve standards of reception and to provide more comprehensive social care, but also to stem irregular population movements in the region. UNHCR will continue to monitor national refugee status determination procedures to ensure fair and efficient adjudication of refugees' claims. In some countries, UNHCR has a formal role in the procedure whereas in others the Office is an observer or has a right to intervene. The Office will continue to intervene in judicial procedures in precedent-setting cases and to assist in the training of border officials, immigration staff and the judiciary. UNHCR will need to provide more refugee law training to support the expansion of governmental bodies tasked with the examination of asylum claims in, for instance, France and the United Kingdom.

UNHCR will advise individual governments and advocate ways to redress shortcomings in legislation, interpretation and practice, while providing inputs to the European Commission and all EU Member States in preparation for Union instruments on asylum and migration. In so doing, UNHCR regards its own role as that of a critical but useful partner in the process of setting standards for an emerging common asylum system in Europe.

### *Public Opinion*

An integral component of UNHCR's overall strategy is to build support from an informed and sympathetic European public. UNHCR and its partners will invest in public information and public awareness activities, in order to make the public at large understand the difference between economic migrants and refugees, and to engender sympathy for the particular situation that refugees face.

In order to curb xenophobic trends and increase tolerance, the Office will conduct awareness campaigns and distribute educational packs and other materials. UNHCR will aim for a more efficient use of the media, capitalising on high-profile emergencies. Sustained efforts will be devoted to avert and counter negative media coverage of asylum issues.

### **Increasing European Support for Refugees and UNHCR World-wide**

Although several European States do support refugee programmes in other regions through bilateral assistance and through NGOs, UNHCR will try to convince

States of the value of the multilateral approach and the importance of UNHCR's unique protection mandate. UNHCR will also work to increase financial support from the private sector and will develop a more proactive and systematic approach in this regard. Although contributions from the private sector will offer some relief, they can in no way be regarded as a means of recouping the shortfall resulting from declining financial contributions from certain Western European States and the European Union. UNHCR will endeavour to expand the donor base further by eliciting the support of corporate donors for humanitarian programmes in other parts of the world.

UNHCR will impress upon European governments that their policies and behaviour are widely regarded as yardsticks against which asylum issues anywhere in the world can be judged. It is therefore of the utmost importance that they uphold international standards and principles of protection. UNHCR will strive to bring an international perspective to the domestic asylum debate in several countries and encourage States to support UNHCR on specific issues, or operations, either directly or through their participation in UNHCR's Executive Committee, the Council of Europe, EU and OSCE.

Public information campaigns about UNHCR's operations world-wide will serve to underpin campaigns focusing on the situation of refugees seeking asylum in Western Europe. While a better informed European public is clearly an end in itself, for UNHCR it will also function as the driving force behind increased funding and solid political support.

### **BUDGET (USD)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Annual Programme</b>
Austria	1,649,631
Belgium	2,065,167
France	2,754,729
Germany	2,172,212
Greece	1,642,668
Ireland	485,686
Italy	2,612,643
Malta	243,500
Netherlands	217,054
Portugal	116,800
Spain	1,208,626
Sweden	1,191,905
Switzerland	739,345
United Kingdom	1,606,432
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,706,398</b>

