

The UK's role in the international refugee protection system

July 2008

In recent years, global refugee numbers have been increasing, from 8.7 million in 2005, 9.9 million in 2006 to 11.4 million by the end of 2007.

Most refugees flee to neighbouring countries and remain in their region of origin. At the end of 2007, the Middle East and North Africa region hosted a quarter of all refugees (approx. 2,700,000 refugees), primarily from Iraq, while Europe hosted 14% (approx. 1,580,000 refugees). Pakistan is the country with the single largest number of refugees (2 million). Between them, Syria and Jordan host over 2 million Iraqi refugees. In comparison, the UK hosts less than 300,000 representing 2.6% of the world's refugees.

Global asylum numbers are also increasing. Approximately 647,000 asylum applications were made around the world in 2007 – an increase of 5% from 2006 and the first rise in 4 years. EU countries received 222,900 new applications in 2007 – an 11% increase on 2006. The UK received 27,900 asylum claims in 2007, just over 8% of the total received in industrialised countries and the lowest level recorded since 1989. By contrast, in 2003, the UK received 60,050 applications.

Some Western European countries such as Austria, Germany and France have seen a steady decrease in asylum numbers. Figures in Germany reached a 30-year low in 2007 with 19,200 individuals applying for asylum. In Sweden, however, the 2007 level is the third highest ever witnessed in the country after 1992 (84,000 claims) and 1993 (37,600 claims). This increase has been caused primarily by the continuous arrival of large numbers of Iraqi asylum-seekers. Major increases have been witnessed at the external borders of the EU, in Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey. Greece has emerged as a major new recipient of asylum-seekers in the industrialized world. In the course of 2007, 25,100 asylum applications were lodged in the country, almost 13,000 more than in 2006, constituting five times more applications than in 2004 (4,500 asylum claims).

Airline Liaison Officers (ALOs) and juxtaposed controls – UK immigration officers posted at train and ferry ports in France and Belgium - are just two of the measures used to control irregular migration overseas. The UK has approximately 40 ALOs posted in over 30 locations around the world. In the last 5 years, UK ALOs have prevented more than 150,000 inadequately documented migrants from reaching the UK. Juxtaposed controls stopped 16,898 people crossing the channel irregularly in 2006. It is not known how many of those stopped were fleeing persecution. In Kent the number of irregular immigrants arriving since 2002 has reduced by 88%.

Since FRONTEX became fully operational in 2006, it has intercepted over 50,000 irregular migrants in 33 different operations, and the UK was involved in approximately half of these operations. FRONTEX does not provide any breakdown of whether those intercepted wished to/did seek protection.

Since 1993, UNITED has recorded the deaths of more than 8800 refugees and migrants Page 1 of 2

attempting to reach Europe irregularly. These deaths are attributed to EU asylum laws and border controls.

The European share of global resettlement remains modest with 5610 resettlement places available. The UK resettled 413 refugees in 2007-8 and increased the quota from 500 to 750, including a commitment to accept Iraqis. These are welcome developments and place the UK's quota 250 higher than the Netherlands and Denmark although significantly lower than Sweden (1900) and Norway (1200).

Divergences between the different asylum systems of Member States have resulted in differing recognition of refugees across Europe. Iraqis were the largest group applying for asylum in industrialised countries in 2006 and 2007. However, positive decision rates at first instance on Iraqi applications varied from 0% to over 90% in the EU during 2007. Recognition rates for Iraqis at first instance: 97% in Hungary; 87.5% in Cyprus; 82% in Sweden; 85% in Germany; 30% in Denmark; 13% in the UK and 0% in Greece.

Visa restrictions continue to apply to nationals of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Zimbabwe.

¹: Figures from UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2007; UNHCR 2007 Global Trends (June 2008); UNHCR Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialised Countries, 2007 (March 2008).

²: Letter from UKIS Border Control in response to RC FOI request, dated 20 February 2007

³: Parliamentary question to Meg Hillier
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/whall/?id=2007-10-24a.124.0&s=asylum#g129.3>

⁴: Welcome to Europe! A Guide to Resettlement: A Comparative Review of Resettlement in Europe. ICMAD 3/06/2008/extPC