



Recommendation 1356 (1998)¹

Activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 1994-1997

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that it cares for some 23 million people worldwide – not only refugees and asylum seekers but also some categories of internally displaced persons, war-affected populations, victims of mass expulsion, returnees, stateless persons and rejected asylum seekers, among others. A quarter of these are in Europe, a third in Africa and a third in Asia.
2. The Assembly expresses its profound gratitude to the High Commissioner, Mrs Sadako Ogata, and to her staff, for their absolute commitment and for their remarkable, difficult and often dangerous work to protect and assist refugees and other vulnerable groups. As one way to make this work better known and supported by the European institutions, the Assembly welcomes the establishment of a UNHCR liaison office at the Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg.
3. Increasingly, UNHCR has sought to help prevent situations which may result in forced migration movements. This preventive approach has involved it in conflict resolution, organising regional consultations, and promoting pluralist democracy and human rights.
4. The Assembly considers that a preventive approach to refugee problems should not only be the focus for greater regional co-operation and co-ordination between the appropriate international organisations, including the Council of Europe in particular, but should also inspire the refugee policies of their member states.
5. The Assembly deplores the failure of the international community to provide UNHCR with the support essential to the fulfilment of its mandate in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where a large number of Rwandan refugees are still unaccounted for.
6. The Assembly is anxious that the refugee and asylum policies of its member states and of the European Union should not result in restricted access to asylum procedures or a more restrictive interpretation of the refugee definition.
7. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers.
 - 7.1. step up co-operation with UNHCR in the framework of the Council of Europe's programmes of co-operation and assistance with countries of central and eastern Europe, in particular in the legal and human rights fields;
 - 7.2. urge the Governing Board of the Social Development Fund to intensify its lending for refugee-related projects in those European states most affected by refugee problems which are not yet Fund members, and to step up its consultations with UNHCR with a view to identifying such projects;
 - 7.3. invite UNHCR to be represented during its discussions on refugee issues;

1. Assembly debate on 29 January 1998 (6th Sitting) (see [Doc. 7972](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, rapporteur: Mr Luis). Text adopted by the Assembly on 29 January 1998 (6th Sitting).



- 7.4. urge those member, candidate and observer states which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) or to lift the geographical limitation on their application of these texts (Turkey and Israel);
- 7.5. ensure that the databases provided to the Council of Europe by UNHCR become an integral part of the former's computerised information system and provide access for UNHCR to the public databases of the Council of Europe;
- 7.6. invite the member states:
 - a. to ensure that unrestricted access to their territory or asylum procedures are maintained for those seeking asylum, in accordance with the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol;
 - b. to ensure that they do not interpret refugee law in such a way as to deny protection to persons who really need it;
 - c. to promote a multi-faceted policy for the European region, combining harmonised, high-quality asylum procedures, fair burden-sharing, the elaboration of sound principles for the declaration, management, and lifting of temporary protection as a complement to the existing protection regime, the establishment of just methods for returning those not – or no longer – in need of protection, and a prevention-based approach which addresses the root causes of refugee flight;
 - d. to help ensure that UNHCR is not left alone to cope with refugee crises in conflict situations without a guarantee of security provided by the international community;
 - e. to respond generously to UNHCR appeals for funding, especially for the implementation of the programme of action of the regional conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighbouring states (Geneva, 30-31 May 1996).