

News Release



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Special Observances

World Refugee Day

Numerous countries and regions all over the world have recognised the importance of holding their own Refugee Days and have been celebrating this occasion for many years. In particular, Africa Refugee Day which is observed on 20th June in several countries, is one of the most widespread of such celebrations. Indeed, it was as an expression of solidarity with Africa, which hosts the most refugees, that the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 55/76 on 4th December 2000. Thus, it was established that as from 2001, 20th June would be celebrated as World Refugee Day.

The past few years have certainly witnessed a considerable increase in irregular migration flows mainly originating from North African countries and heading towards Europe. Consequently and even more so as a result of its geographic position at the centre of the Mediterranean, Malta is also experiencing a steady influx of irregular immigrants/asylum seekers. Records show that of 3,576 illegal immigrants who arrived in Malta between 2002 and 2004, an average of 85 per cent were coming from Africa.

The rights and duties of asylum seekers and refugees are defined in the Refugees Act, which was enacted in Malta in 2000 and actually came into force on 1st October 2001. A direct and important consequence of this Act was the establishment of the Office of the Refugee Commissioner and the Refugees Appeals Board. On 1st January 2002, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner became fully operational. It is certainly interesting to point out that, between 2002 and 2004, Malta granted refugee or humanitarian protection status to 53 per cent of all asylum applicants, thus emerging as the country with the highest acceptance rate in Europe.

Prior to 2002, applications for refugee status were received, processed and determined by UNHCR (Rome) so that Malta would implement the decisions made accordingly. According to the figures given by the Emigrants Commission, between the years 1995 and 2001, the number of recognised refugees decreased by 35 per cent, whilst the number of recognised child refugees decreased by 27.5 per cent. On the other hand, refugees coming from Africa increased by 17.2 per cent over the same period.

The year 2004 marked the largest number of applications reaching the Office of the Refugee Commissioner, that is, 994 applications. This number also includes pending applications brought over from the previous year. During the first five months of 2005, the Office of the Refugee Commissioner has already received 494 applications. Of these, almost 70 per cent were granted refugee or humanitarian protection status. Over a longer time span between January 2002 and May 2005, almost 90 per cent of the grants were given as humanitarian protection.

A number of NGOs in Malta are involved in providing aid to refugees and asylum seekers. In 2004, almost 84 per cent of their total workforce consisted of volunteers, the majority of which were women.

There is a pattern of negative balance in the financial performance of these NGOs between the years 2000 and 2004, with the exception of 2002, where a large donation was granted to a particular NGO. In 2004, NGO expenditure exceeded income by 15 per cent ■

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Table 1. Boats arriving in Malta with illegal immigrants: 2002-2004

Year	No. of boats arriving	No. of people on board
2002	21	1,686
2003	12	502
2004	52	1,388

Source: Immigration Section - Police GHQ

Policy Document. Irregular Immigrants: Refugees and Integration -
Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs/Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2005.

Table 2. Recognised refugees in Malta: 1995-2001

Year	No. of refugees	Of which children	of which percentage from Africa
1995	698	200	23.8
1996	538	162	21.0
1997	448	140	27.5
1998	450	125	35.5
1999	378	64	29.6
2000	277	48	31.4
2001	244	55	41.0

Source: Emigrants' Commission

Table 3. Applications received by the Office of the Refugee Commissioner and asylum decisions taken: Jan 2002-May 2005

Year	No. of applications	percentage of which granted refugee status/humanitarian protection	percentage of which rejected applications
2002	474	28.1	60.3
2003	568	67.1	32.9
2004	997	61.1	30.0
2005*	494	69.8	32.0

Source: Office of the Refugee Commissioner

*up to May 2005

Table 4. Asylum decisions taken by the Office of the Refugee Commissioner: Jan 2002-May 2005

Year	Granted refugee Status	Granted humanitarian protection	Total
2002	22	111	133
2003	53	328	381
2004	49	560	609
2005*	27	318	345

Source: Office of the Refugee Commissioner

*up to May 2005

Table 5. Persons engaged with NGOs involved in providing aid to refugees and asylum seekers: 2000-2004

Persons engaged										
	2000		2001		2002		2003		2004	
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Full-time employees	1	5	2	5	1	4	1	4	1	4
Part-time employees	1	5	1	8	-	8	1	10	1	10
Voluntary workers	39	55	39	67	21	23	35	54	33	50

Source: NSO data collection programme on social welfare-oriented NGOs.

Table 6. Financial performance of NGOs involved in aid to refugees and asylum seekers: 2000-2004

Financial performance					
	2000	2001	2002*	2003	2004
Income	67,620	67,523	97,011	55,891	79,255
Expenditure	85,548	91,771	60,009	70,332	91,455
Balance	-17,928	-24,248	37,002	-14,441	-12,200

* In 2002 one NGO was the beneficiary of a donation by L-Istrina

Source: NSO data collection programme on social welfare-oriented NGOs.

Methodological Notes

Sources:

- Immigration Section, Police GHQ
- Emigrants Commission
- Office of the Refugee Commissioner
- NSO data collection programme on Social Welfare Oriented NGOs
- Policy Document. *Irregular Immigrants: Refugees and Integration*. Ministry for Justice and Home Affairs/Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, 2005.

The Emigrants Commission is the source of the numerical data for refugees in Malta prior to January 2002. The Office for the Refugee Commissioner started to function in January 2002.

In Table 3, the percentage granted refugee status/humanitarian protection and the percentage of the rejected applications do not sum up to the total number of applications received by the Office of the Refugee Commissioner. The reason is that these are part of a continuously shifting procedure with a number of applications still in the processing stage and a number of others being withdrawn.