



*Jesuit Refugee Service
-Europe-
Service Jésuite des
Réfugiés*

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**World Refugee Day – June 20th 2003
Concerns about proposed change to asylum in EU**

Proposals under consideration at EU level involve a radical change to the asylum system in the EU and give major cause for concern. Part of the proposals envisages the setting up Transit Processing Centres where the claims of asylum seekers would be processed. Heads of governments meeting in Thessaloniki this week will discuss whether to adopt these plans.

JRS wishes to highlight its concerns with these proposals and asks governments to find different alternatives.

Among the JRS concerns are:

- the proposals will involve routine detention of asylum seekers. This is contrary to international norms
- they will necessitate proposed forced deportation to centres outside the EU where there is often inadequate infrastructure
- lack of adequate human rights safeguards
- lack of translation facilities, legal advice, education and health facilities

‘There are many questions about the proposed new system and many potential legal problems’ said JRS Europe Director John Dardis. ‘The asylum system could be put at risk and people in genuine need of protection will not be helped. Governments need to seriously reflect before they adopt such changes’

A modified version of these proposals suggest processing asylum claims within the EU close to the new external borders after enlargement in 2004. However, these proposals too seem to involve routine use of detention and forced transit to the centres.

A problematic issue for any host governments is the issue of what to do with the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of irregular migrants whom they will not be able to repatriate because of a lack of travel documents. Repatriating failed asylum seekers is already a problem for national governments. But the new arrangement will concentrate these cases in one or two places causing problems both for host populations and host governments.

Asylum system proposals flawed

‘Any government considering going along with these proposals should look at the logistical problems’ said John Dardis. ‘JRS acknowledges that there are problems in how the existing system works: the imbalance between how much money is spent on asylum seekers in Africa and in Europe and how economic migrants are using the asylum system as a way to gain entry to Europe. But we do not believe that governments have yet found a proper way forward.’

JRS holds that the problems in the asylum system which the governments are trying to solve can be better addressed by measures such as

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- establishment of workable legal migration channels thus cutting down on the need of economic migrants to use the asylum channel
- speedy processing of claims to avoid backlogs
- higher quality processing of asylum claims at first instance thus reducing the rate of costly appeals
- serious attention to the root causes of the movement of peoples

A recent Communication from the European Commission to the Council and the European Parliament also advocates some of the above measures. JRS will draw up a detailed response to the Communication from the Communication within the next weeks.

The JRS policy officers are based in a number of European countries where JRS has active projects, as well as in Geneva and in the JRS head office in Rome.

JRS updates on this issue will be available on its websites at www.jrs.net and on www.jrseurope.org.

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JRS Europe is a network of 20 offices working in Europe with and for refugees and displaced people. It is part of the JRS international network and a project of the Jesuit Conference of European Provincials. 2

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‘Serving Forgotten Refugees’