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**Asylum** seekers being left outside the gates of the rich world during the war on terrorism are turning to human smugglers, a new U.N. University study found.

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, there has been a "shift from the protection of **asylum** seekers to protection from them" in the United States and European Union, co-author Edward Newman said.

The wealthy industrialized countries have cut back on entry levels for those fleeing repressive governments, said the study released on Thursday, World Refugee Day. Governments have shut out **asylum** seekers by tightening visa rules, closing borders and designating some countries "safe" and, therefore, effectively precluding their citizens from seeking **asylum**.

In the United States, for example, the 2002 admission quota for resettling refugees was set at 70,000, but 26,000 were admitted, said the study released by the Tokyo-based U.N. University.

The long-cherished Western institution of granting political **asylum** is now "under grave threat" as nations erect ever-higher walls because of fears of terrorist attacks, the study warned.

As a result, many of those desperate to reach sanctuary were turning to human smugglers, often paying thousands of dollars to make dangerous and illegal journeys.

A trip from Afghanistan to Western Europe was recently estimated to cost 8,000 to 12,000 dollars, leaving many indebted and vulnerable to exploitation, the authors said.

The proportion of illegal immigrants who are political rather than economic refugees is much higher than most decision-makers believe, said the study, "Refugees and Forced Displacement".

Of those being smuggled into Europe, more than half were seeking **asylum** because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group or political beliefs, it said.

Britain, Germany and Austria now receive 250,000 to 350,000 illegal immigrants per year - nearly equal to the 1994 total for all Western Europe - said Doctor Khalid **Koser** of the University College London.

Newman challenged rich countries to do more to help **asylum** seekers. "Those who have the capacity to extend security to people perilously lacking it have a basic human obligation to do so," he said.

Added U.N. University Rector Hans van Ginkel: "It is clear that the start of a war on terror and other developments have shut the doors of sanctuary to many people in need of shelter from religious and political persecution or from bloody violence and conflict."

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