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Update on UNHCR's operations in Europe

A. Situational analysis including new developments

In the first half of 2012, more than 154,000 asylum applications were lodged in the 38 European countries for which UNHCR compiles statistics. Some 122,500 of the applications were made in European Union (EU) member States. Europe continued to receive large numbers of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

Throughout Europe there has been a rise in the number of refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. Nearly 115,000 have arrived in Turkey since April 2011 and are being assisted under a temporary protection regime. The majority of Syrian refugees are living in camps in the Turkish border provinces of Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis and Sanliurfa. The emergency response by the Turkish authorities has been of a high standard, with new arrivals rapidly settled in camps and provided with food, accommodation and medical care. UNHCR is assisting the Government with relief items and technical advice.

There was also a significant increase in the number of Iraqi asylum-seekers arriving in Turkey during the second half of 2011 and first half of 2012. Challenges remain in the areas of reception, registration, status determination and assistance.

Managing mixed asylum and migration flows within Europe requires consistent and protection-sensitive border management. This is particularly important in the Mediterranean context, where the need for a comprehensive approach to issues such as rescue-at-sea and access to territory remain of critical importance. UNHCR continues its engagement with the European border management agency, Frontex, and has contributed to the forthcoming Frontex Consultative Forum. The Office has strengthened its cooperation with European institutions on the prevention of human trafficking. The needs of unaccompanied children were highlighted in UNHCR's "Protecting Children on the Move" project, which ran in France, Greece and Italy.

As many European countries struggled with severe economic difficulties, UNHCR called for continued respect for asylum principles. UNHCR and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) assisted in asylum reform in Greece, including the creation of an Asylum Service. Significant progress was made on the legislative amendments to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). A new early-warning mechanism under the Dublin Regulation involving EASO is an important step towards closer cooperation among EU member States.

Efforts to increase resettlement to the European Union resulted in a joint resettlement programme and the launch of a publicity campaign encouraging an increase in the number of resettlement places within the EU to 20,000 a year by 2020. UNHCR remained engaged in the relocation of refugees from Malta to other EU countries.

Public outreach and awareness-raising activities related to racism and xenophobia were increased in many countries. In Greece and Italy, UNHCR carried out an anti-racism campaign under the slogan, "One victim of racist violence is too many".

In Malta and Cyprus, public service announcements were screened on television and in cinemas. Working with Greece's National Commission for Human Rights, UNHCR established a racist incident and reporting tool. Together with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), UNHCR contributed to European Commission country reports on racism and intolerance and to the European Parliamentary Assembly resolution on the portrayal of refugees during election campaigns. The Office also engaged partners in these efforts at its Annual Consultations with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs).

B. Progress made and challenges encountered in achieving strategic priorities

UNHCR offices in Europe continue to gather comparative information on border practices, asylum procedures, reception conditions, and support for integration. The assistance of States is sought to improve the collection of age and gender data on a number of key protection indicators.

Access to territory, asylum procedures and protection against refoulement

Access to territory and to national asylum procedures remains a challenge in many European countries. Diverging asylum policies, increased reliance on re-admission agreements and gaps in the quality of procedures mean that not all asylum-seekers are able to access the protection to which they are entitled. For instance, a number of States in Eastern Europe ignored interim measures by the European Court for Human Rights, resulting in several cases of *refoulement*. Many refugees coming to Europe continue to be detained. Asylum-seekers in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Malta and a number of Eastern European countries face particularly difficult situations. Together with the Council of Europe, UNHCR held a roundtable on the detention of unaccompanied and separated children and is collaborating with the Parliamentary Assembly on developing guidelines for Parliamentarians with standards for the detention of persons of concern.

To better address the needs of unaccompanied children, UNHCR established a dialogue with a number of States on the new Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child.

Building and maintaining effective asylum systems

UNHCR is concerned that asylum procedures among EU member and non-member States continue to vary significantly. The need for high-quality procedures is of particular importance in EU accession countries, which are often perceived by asylum-seekers as transit destinations.

The Office has successfully worked on quality assurance mechanisms with a number of countries in Western and Central Europe and has secured funding for additional initiatives in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

UNHCR continued to work with relevant authorities on improving protection for particular groups, with an emphasis on age and gender. The Office intervened in court proceedings on the issues of statelessness, social assistance for people granted protection, religious persecution, and refugee protection considerations for victims of trafficking. Judicial engagement was pursued through training and contact with legal networks.

UNHCR continues to address key protection issues through third-party interventions before the European Court of Human Rights and by submitting observations to the European Committee of Social Rights.

Facilitating durable solutions for refugees

In an effort to improve the integration of refugees in many European countries, UNHCR focused on building capacity at the national and municipal level; ensuring timely and appropriate family reunification; and identifying ways to engage refugees in the integration process.

UNHCR secured financing from the European Refugee Fund for an integration project in eight European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, France, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden. It also provided comments to the European Commission Green Paper on family reunification. In a number of countries, engagement with local communities has increased, including in Norway, where the Office took part in discussions on the integration of Somali refugees.

In the Balkans, UNHCR will increase its focus on protection and asylum systems. In line with the outcome of a donors' conference held in Sarajevo in April, UNHCR will contribute to the monitoring of the Regional Housing Programme which will target 74,000 refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. A dialogue has been initiated on the implementation of the cessation clause for Bosnians and Croatians who became refugees as a result of the 1991-1994 conflict. For those individuals who remain displaced from Kosovo, UNHCR supports transitional solutions, in particular housing, access to rights and livelihood opportunities.

Some 140 refugees were naturalized in Georgia during the first half of 2012, while in the Russian Federation the Office redoubled its efforts to find solutions for 1,000 Afghan refugees.

Resettlement has increased in a number of European countries. Germany committed to a yearly quota of 300 resettled refugees. UNHCR is working with Belgium and Spain on the resettlement of 100 and 80 refugees respectively. Emergency Transit Centres in Romania and Slovakia continue to assist refugees destined for resettlement.

UNHCR is involved in intergovernmental consultative processes such as the EU's Eastern Partnership Panel on Migration and Asylum, the Prague Process and the Budapest Process, all of which support protection advocacy and cooperation.

Raising awareness and fostering positive public attitudes

Public attitude surveys in eight European countries showed overall support for providing protection to refugees, but made clear that negative views of refugees and asylum-seekers persist. Media relations and information sharing were complemented by outreach campaigns. In Italy, a mechanism to monitor racist attitudes and language in the media was created. UNHCR's "Dilemmas" campaign was launched in a number of countries, while such iconic buildings as the Coliseum and the European Parliament were used for World Refugee Day exhibits. The Office was also visible at the London Olympic Games.

Addressing the needs of Internally Displaced Persons

Georgia adopted an action plan on IDPs that was formulated with input from UNHCR. The ongoing privatization of houses for 6,000 IDP families by the Government was complemented by legal counseling provided by partners on issues relating to house maintenance and social entitlements. In Abkhazia, UNHCR made progress on the construction or rehabilitation of 134 houses for IDPs, which corresponds to about 60 per cent of the total needs.

Preventing and reducing statelessness

Since the Ministerial Intergovernmental Event which took place in December 2011,¹ Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova fulfilled their pledges to accede to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and Georgia to the 1954 Convention. The Republic of Moldova also fulfilled its pledge to establish a statelessness determination procedure, and Hungary lifted its reservations to the

¹ Intergovernmental event at the ministerial level of Member States of the United Nations on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

1954 Convention.

UNHCR works closely with governments to establish procedures for the identification of stateless persons. In Georgia, this resulted in a decrease in the number of stateless individuals from 1,570 to 1,340. The Office is assisting the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in drafting a resolution and a recommendation on access to nationality.

UNHCR is also supporting efforts to ensure personal documentation for the Roma population. This is being pursued through the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 initiative, which commits European governments to improving the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma.

C. Financial information

The initial budget for Europe approved by the Executive Committee in 2011 amounted to US\$ 181.5 million. Taking into consideration revisions to the Operations Plan for the region, the current 2012 budget stands at US\$ 194.8 million. Any funding shortfall for the Europe operations would have a significant impact on the ability of UNHCR to deliver key protection activities in terms of advocacy as well as capacity building in almost all regions.
