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## Update on UNHCR's operations in Europe

### A. Situational analysis including new developments

The crisis in Ukraine has caused substantial displacement internally and across borders. By 1 September, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine reached 260,000. Almost 94 per cent of them originate from the eastern regions. In the Russian Federation, over 188,000 persons have applied for asylum, 138,800 have applied for other forms of legal stay and some 554,000 are reported to have entered the country under the visa-free regime.

The increase in maritime movements in the Mediterranean led to hundreds of deaths at sea, including many Syrians who fled war in their country. In one incident alone, in early October 2013, more than 360 persons lost their lives off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa. In response, Italy launched the *Mare Nostrum* operation to reinforce patrols and rescue capacity in the Mediterranean Sea. Since the start of the initiative in October 2013, approximately 113,000 persons have been rescued by the operation.

Following the deterioration of the situation in Iraq which began in January 2014, an increasing number of Iraqis have arrived in neighbouring countries, including Turkey. Between January and June 2014, the number of arrivals in Turkey reached more than 43,000, as compared to 19,000 during the whole of 2013.

The number of asylum-seekers in South-East Europe has continued to rise, with more than 5,000 persons requesting asylum in the region between January and June 2014. Syrians constitute the largest nationality (over 2,300), while Serbia continued to receive the largest proportion (over 4,000), followed by Montenegro (500).

Overall, some 264,000 asylum applications were lodged in 38 European countries between January and end-June 2014, representing a 30 per cent increase as compared to the same period in 2013. Some 82 per cent of the applications were made in European Union Member States. The main countries of origin, according to government statistics, were the Syrian Arab Republic (62,000), Iraq (29,000), Eritrea (27,000) and Afghanistan (22,000). In the European Union, the largest numbers of asylum applications were received by Germany (66,000), France (29,000), Sweden (29,000) and Italy (24,000).

### B. Progress and challenges in achieving strategic priorities

*Safeguarding asylum space in the broader migration context: access to territory for persons of concern and acceptable reception conditions*

Europe continued to be affected by irregular mixed movements prompted by instability in countries of origin, the collapse of law and order in countries of transit or first asylum, and the closure of parts of the European Union external land border. Reports of push-backs at borders persisted. Sea arrivals in Italy were up eightfold compared to previous years, and a considerable increase in arrivals was also noted in the Greek islands. The majority of the 113,000 persons rescued by the *Mare Nostrum* operation were of Eritrean or Syrian nationality. As a result of the large numbers of new arrivals, the reception capacities in affected States have been strained and onward movements have become commonplace.

In line with its Global Initiative on Protection at Sea, UNHCR has developed the Central Mediterranean Sea Initiative (CMSI), which promotes solidarity for rescue-at-sea within the European Union and in countries of first asylum, transit and origin. The CMSI also seeks to strengthen cooperation among relevant stakeholders, including the European Commission, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the EU border agency Frontex, the newly-created European Commission Task Force for the Mediterranean, European Union Member States, the International Maritime Organization, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners. UNHCR has continued to monitor access to territory and to asylum procedures by collaborating with border authorities and implementing partners, as well as by strengthening cooperation with countries outside the Schengen area and the EU borders.

UNHCR is carrying out the EU-funded project “Response to Vulnerability in Asylum,” which is aimed at identifying persons with specific needs during reception and throughout the asylum process. A number of EU Member States are engaged in developing mechanisms for the effective identification of and response to such needs.

Given the large numbers of Afghan asylum-seekers that continue to arrive on the continent, UNHCR has started a review of their protection situation in Europe. Carried out together with a number of European States, EASO and IOM, the review is expected to provide a better understanding of the reasons Afghans continue to move to and within Europe, the particular challenges States in the region are facing as a result, and possible protection gaps. It will also provide a forum for exchange among affected countries. The results of the review will assist States in better targeting their responses for Afghan asylum-seekers in Europe.

The detention of asylum-seekers and refugees remains a concern in the region. UNHCR has further strengthened its efforts to promote alternatives to detention, particularly for refugees and asylum-seekers, inter alia, through the roll out of its global Beyond Detention strategy. Positive developments were noted in some European Union Member States, especially with respect to finding alternatives to detention for families with children.

In follow-up to the regional initiative in the western Balkans on “Refugee Protection and International Migration: Suggestions for a Comprehensive Approach,” which was jointly launched by UNHCR and IOM in July 2013, consultations have taken place at national and regional levels. The next steps will be to further develop priority projects in line with the recommendations set out in the Vienna Round Table Action Plan and, where needed, to mobilize funding for such projects.

In Eastern Europe, a small but growing number of cases of *refoulement* involving abductions of asylum-seekers and refugees have been reported. UNHCR also remains concerned regarding possible *refoulement* in extradition cases of asylum-seekers whose cases have not yet been fully examined.

### *Building and maintaining effective asylum and protection systems*

Support for UNHCR’s asylum-related quality initiatives remains strong in many EU Member States. The Asylum Systems Quality Initiative in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus (QIEE) has successfully continued in its second year. Since the inception of the quality initiative projects, increased recognition rates have been observed and the quality of decisions has improved in most of the participating countries.

As part of its efforts to raise awareness among policy makers about female genital mutilation (FGM) impacting refugee women and girls in Europe, UNHCR released the publication *Too Much Pain*<sup>1</sup>, along with video testimonies of those affected by this

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/5315def56.html>.

harmful practice. The publication provides a comprehensive analysis of the situation and statistical evidence to advance discussions on the necessary policies and tools to address it.

In Turkey, UNHCR is strengthening its cooperation with the General Directorate for Migration Management and helping to build its operational capacity. The areas of focus include registration (Syrian and traditional caseloads), resettlement and the development of social policies with an emphasis on people with special needs.

UNHCR has supported standard-setting by courts, both at national and regional levels. In 2014, an important decision taken by the Court of Justice of the European Union, following the provision of information by UNHCR, was related to the interpretation of the notion of “internal armed conflict” in the context of subsidiary protection (C-285/12 - Diakité). The European Court of Human Rights also issued unprecedented judgements on the obligation of States to deal swiftly and rigorously with the family reunification of refugees (*Mugenzi v. France* (no. 52701/09) and *Tanda-Muzinga v. France* (no. 2260/10)) and on statelessness as a source of particular vulnerability (*Kim v. Russia* (no. 44260/13)).

#### *Securing durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons*

UNHCR has dedicated additional resources to promote resettlement in Europe and to build reception and integration capacities. The European Resettlement Network, which is jointly coordinated by UNHCR, IOM and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), has been further developed and its visibility increased with funds from the European Union. Allied with the SHARE Network (led by ICMC and co-financed by the European Commission), the European Resettlement Network continues to promote cooperation among resettlement practitioners in new, established and emerging resettlement countries at the regional and local levels, and to help build their capacity, including with reception and integration. It has also helped raise awareness about the need for emergency resettlement, including in response to humanitarian crises such as the Syria situation, and facilitated the exchange of good practices among members and other stakeholders.

Responding to the call by UNHCR for solidarity and burden-sharing with countries hosting Syrian refugees, 17 European States had come forward by mid-August with pledges to receive some 26,300 Syrians through resettlement or humanitarian admission programmes. Separately, Ireland launched the Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland initiated the Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme. A number of European countries which had limited or no previous involvement in resettlement have also pledged places for Syrian refugees, including Austria (humanitarian admission), Belarus, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg, while Switzerland has reinstated an annual resettlement programme on a pilot basis that will benefit Syrian refugees.

To promote the efficient management of migration and asylum flows and strengthen the common European Union approach to these issues, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund was approved in April 2014. It will provide EUR 360 million for resettlement activities for the period 2014-2020.

In Georgia, UNHCR continued to seek durable solutions for IDPs, conduct monitoring and promote sustainable housing options for some 40,000 families, in close cooperation with the Government. UNHCR also provided technical advice and monitored the re-registration process for IDPs.

As part of the durable solutions strategy for the western Balkans and to encourage Governments to effectively address the remaining challenges, UNHCR has recommended that host States apply by the end of 2014 the “ceased circumstances” cessation clause for the refugee population displaced from Croatia during the 1991-1995 conflict. Host countries which decided to postpone the implementation of the cessation clause in order to complete local integration or repatriation processes were encouraged to implement cessation by 2017.

A three-year EU-funded project for Bosnia and Herzegovina launched by UNHCR is aimed at implementing the Revised Strategy for the implementation of Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement and supporting solutions for IDPs through a joint needs-based prioritization of communities and families with specific needs. The project suffered a serious setback as a result of flooding in the subregion in May. UNHCR is also working with the Serbian authorities on finding durable solutions for the remaining IDPs, including 18,000 vulnerable individuals from the Roma community.

*Preventing and resolving situations of statelessness*

The number of European States parties to the statelessness conventions grew with the accessions of Belgium, Georgia and Montenegro to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. UNHCR also welcomed the adoption by Turkey of a law permitting accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Hungary amended their nationality legislation to facilitate the naturalization of stateless persons, while Georgia, Latvia and Sweden amended their laws to facilitate, to a certain extent, the acquisition of nationality by children born in the country who would otherwise be stateless. Following joint advocacy by UNHCR and civil society to address statelessness in the country, Ireland recognized its first stateless person in 2014.

UNHCR continued to collaborate with the European Network on Statelessness, a regional civil society alliance which promotes action to address statelessness. UNHCR also joined efforts with the European Commission and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to address challenges related to accessing civil registration and documentation in South-Eastern Europe. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 2042 (2014)<sup>2</sup> and Resolution 1989 (2014)<sup>3</sup> that call for action on statelessness.

## **C. Financial information**

During its 64<sup>th</sup> session, the Executive Committee approved a budget for Europe of \$343.3 million for 2014. The budget currently stands at \$485.4 million, reflecting an increase of \$142.1 million due to supplementary budgets for the Syria and Ukraine situations. The Syria situation has impacted budgetary needs in many countries in Europe, including Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Budgetary needs in Ukraine to address urgent humanitarian needs have also doubled since the original budget approved by the Executive Committee. By mid-August, contributions received for Europe amounted to \$100.0 million, leaving a gap of \$385.4 million against the current budget. The present funding gap is limiting UNHCR's ability to deliver emergency assistance and protection to all vulnerable persons of concern impacted by the Syria and Ukraine crises.

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=20872&lang=en>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=20871&lang=en>.