**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Standing Committee
71st meeting

Update of UNHCR's operations in Europe

A.   Situational analysis including new developments

In 2017, some 172,300 refugees and migrants are known to have arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, including 119,350 to Italy, 29,700 to Greece and 22,100 to Spain. An additional 6,250 arrived in Spain by land via the enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta. Overall, the number of arrivals in Europe decreased by 53 per cent compared 2016, largely due to a reduction in the numbers from Turkey to Greece (83 per cent reduction in 2017) and from northern Africa to Italy (34 per cent reduction in 2017), while arrivals in Spain by sea increased almost three-fold compared to the previous year and arrivals by land increased by 5 per cent.

With mounting restrictions to access territory, refugees and migrants have attempted to use different and, at times, more dangerous routes to reach Europe. Aside from an increase in arrivals to Spain and Cyprus, UNHCR has also observed a larger number of arrivals through the Black Sea, a particularly treacherous route, where a number of concerns regarding disembarkation and reception remain.

Over 3,120 refugees and migrants are known to have died or gone missing while crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2017. Some 18.4 per cent of the total arrivals by sea in Europe were children, and just over half of them were unaccompanied and separated. Nearly 15,540 unaccompanied and separated children made the dangerous journey across the sea to Italy, representing 13 per cent of all arrivals, which is consistent with 2016.

In the western Balkans and central Europe, arrivals of refugees and migrants continued, with further diversification of the routes and more prominent arrivals in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Romania.

Turkey continues to host the largest number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate worldwide, with 3.4 million Syrians and 343,000 refugees and others of concern of various nationalities.

In 2017, 625,000 new asylum applications were lodged in 38 European countries, representing a 49 per cent decrease compared to 2016. Applications in European Union Member States represented over 99.7 per cent of these applications and were lodged primarily in Germany (32 per cent) and Italy (20 per cent). Asylum applicants in 2017 mainly originated from the Syrian Arab Republic.

Four years since the conflict in eastern Ukraine began, the dire humanitarian crisis is protracted and a political solution remains to be found, with increased security incidents at the contact line in 2017. Nearly 1.6 million people are internally displaced, while over 480,000 have sought asylum in other countries, mainly in the Russian Federation (427,240), but also in the European Union. In addition, more than 1.4 million Ukrainians reside mainly in the Russian Federation, as well as in Belarus and Poland, on the basis of applications for other forms of legal stay.

B.   Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Reforming the Common European Asylum System and strengthening the collective European response

Efforts continue to be made to advance the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Discussions among decision-makers are proving challenging on the establishment of mechanisms to foster intra-State solidarity and on measures aimed at managing mixed arrivals. In this context, UNHCR continues to promote the approach it put forward in its December 2016 paper, "Better protecting refugees in the European Union and globally". In particular, UNHCR recommends that the reformed CEAS include an intra-State solidarity mechanism entailing the physical relocation of asylum-seekers. Such a mechanism would have to be capable of swift and easy activation, and full participation in the mechanism would need to be secured. UNHCR also calls on Member States to focus on fair and efficient procedures to assess international protection needs in the European Union rather than mandatory admissibility procedures. In order to promote its approach as a way forward, UNHCR is working on further developing the modalities of such fair and efficient procedures.

Ensuring an effective operational response

UNHCR has continued to assist some governments in addressing reception gaps, with particular attention to individuals with specific needs. In Greece, the authorities have progressively increased their presence in the registration and identification centres, which has allowed UNHCR to continue reducing its operational engagement, while maintaining its protection monitoring role. UNHCR will maintain its cash assistance programme and accommodation scheme throughout 2018, but with a view toward more targeted assistance and the eventual transition of these activities to management by the responsible government authorities in 2019. In Turkey, UNHCR continued to support the efforts of the authorities to provide humanitarian assistance through the provision of health care, non-food items, winterization kits and targeted cash programmes.

Notwithstanding an overall decrease of arrivals to Europe, arrivals in southern and eastern Europe remained relatively stable. UNHCR is working closely with governments on the development of contingency plans in case of new large-scale arrivals.

Safeguarding asylum space and building effective protection systems, including in the context of mixed movements

People in need of international protection continued to seek safety in Europe, despite physical, legal and administrative restrictions. UNHCR has documented repeated push-backs at borders, leading in some instances to fatalities, as well as increasing restrictions on access to asylum in many countries of the region. In response, UNHCR has undertaken advocacy with governments and the European Union and its institutions, and judicial interventions to ensure that international standards are upheld.

Although legal and institutional approaches vary, countries in eastern Europe continue to face common challenges. The quality initiative, covering Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, has been expanded to include a capacity-building component to enhance the quality of asylum decisions and provide country of origin information to first instance decision-makers, judges, border officials and legal practitioners. UNHCR is seeking to advance its strategic partnership with the Russian Federation in the context of the global compact on refugees.

Promoting acceptable reception conditions

Challenges in reception conditions persist in several countries of the region, in particular due to overcrowding and the lack of capacities to identify and refer persons with specific needs. In Greece, despite the strengthened role of the Government, important gaps remain. The situation is particularly worrying on the Aegean islands, where thousands of refugees are living in unsuitable facilitates at reception and identification centres and face numerous challenges, including with respect to water, sanitation and hygiene, insecurity and incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Further efforts are needed to ease pressure on Lesvos, Chios and Samos, by further shortening procedures for people eligible to move out of the facilities and urgently improving conditions for those who need to stay.

In Italy, almost 80 per cent of all persons arriving by sea in 2016 and 2017 have applied for asylum. This development has resulted in overstretched asylum processing and reception capacities. At the peak of arrivals in the autumn of 2017, some 200,000 individuals were accommodated in regular and emergency reception facilities. UNHCR will continue to help strengthen asylum procedures; address the situation of persons with specific needs, including survivors of SGBV and persons with disabilities; and advocate against arbitrary detention.

In Spain, UNHCR has been advocating at the national and municipality levels to improve reception conditions and referrals for victims of SGBV and trafficking and to further enhance emergency preparedness. Strengthened capacity is needed as the numbers increase.

Strengthening participatory and community-based approaches

UNHCR will increase its focus on the operationalization of participatory and community-based approaches. Meaningful engagement of refugee communities will take place through outreach volunteer networks and platforms for dialogue and advocacy. Skills-building programmes will enhance the capacities of affected populations to protect themselves and support each other, and to undertake outreach and peaceful co-existence initiatives. With the aim of bringing together refugee representatives living in different European countries and giving refugees a voice, the first meeting of the "Refugee Coalition for Europe" was held on 15 December 2017, organized with the support of the Municipality of Milan, Italy, and in partnership with Independent Diplomat, a non-governmental diplomatic advisory group.

Child protection and the prevention of and response to SGBV will continue to be priority areas of intervention. Specific risks faced by unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) will be addressed in line with the 2017 document, "The Way Forward to Strengthened Policies and Practices for UASC in Europe". Through a consultative process, strategic partnerships and community outreach on SGBV prevention and response shall be further enhanced. Capacity building to strengthen community-based approaches will target governments, partners and UNHCR staff. Access to national services will receive increased attention, in particular education as large numbers of children are reportedly out of school.

Securing solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons

In pursuit of the European Commission proposal for a European Union Resettlement Framework[1], to which UNHCR provided input, trilogue[2] discussions commenced in December 2017. UNHCR contributed to negotiations on standard operations procedures for the European Union's voluntary humanitarian admission scheme from Turkey, which were

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[1] UNHCR's observations and recommendations on the proposed European Union Resettlement Framework are available from http://www.refworld.org/docid/5890b1d74.html.
[2] The term trilogue refers to informal tripartite meetings attended by representatives of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

endorsed at the technical level in December 2017. UNHCR also provided inputs to Member State planning for resettlement in 2018.[3] In 2017, 25 European countries resettled approximately 26,400 refugees[4], up from 17,100 resettled by 23 countries the previous year. Taking into account the global resettlement needs, which stand at an estimated 1.2 million, European States are encouraged to contribute increasing resettlement places on an annual basis, in addition to other complementary pathways of admission, in the spirit of global solidarity.

The EU's emergency relocation mechanism formally ended on 26 September 2017, with over 33,400 asylum-seekers relocated from Greece (21,700 out of 66,400 originally foreseen, or 33 per cent of the total) and Italy (11,180 out of 39,600 originally foreseen, or 28% of total) as of January 2018. The relocation of asylum-seekers represents a key element for the development of an intra-State solidarity mechanism to support European Union Member States facing disproportionate pressure on their asylum systems.

Efforts of Ukraine to address the situation of internal displaced persons (IDPs) were complemented by the adoption of an IDP integration and durable solutions strategy in November 2017. As the strategy could noticeably improve the situation of IDPs, UNHCR will continue working with the relevant authorities for its effective implementation. In the South Caucasus, UNHCR welcomed efforts to facilitate durable housing solutions and strengthen social inclusion for IDPs.

Increasing integration and resettlement opportunities out of eastern Europe for vulnerable refugees

In the South Caucasus, more attention and progress in promoting self-reliance and local integration for refugees was observed. The significant accomplishments in integrating and enhancing the self-reliance of some Syrian refugees represent an opportunity for further inclusion of other groups.

While providing legal counselling for those who are in need of solutions and for those at risk of statelessness, including Roma, UNHCR will continue to engage at the strategic policy level to support governments to fully assume responsibility for durable solutions for those displaced in South-East Europe by the conflicts in the 1990s.

With new integration laws and strategies implemented across Europe, important opportunities have arisen for collaboration with governments, local authorities, NGOs, the private sector, national and international development actors, and civil society to improve integration prospects for refugees.

Collaboration with private sector partners was extended to support refugee integration. UNHCR and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) jointly developed a series of "employing refugees" business dialogues, with the aim of mapping

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[3] Inputs were based on UNHCR's "Projected global resettlement needs 2018" publication, which is available from http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/593a88f27/unhcr-projected-global-resettlement-needs-2018.html, with an emphasis on the central Mediterranean route, CRRF roll-out countries and resettlement needs in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

[4] Resettlement departure figures reported by UNHCR may not match resettlement statistics published by States as Government figures may include individuals who were resettled outside of UNHCR processes. The figures quoted for 2017 are tentative and subject to change.

challenges and making recommendations. The outcome will serve as the basis for a multi-stakeholder action plan on the employment of refugees.

Preventing and resolving situations of statelessness

Advocacy with the European Union and its institutions to address statelessness continued. UNHCR and the European Parliament hosted an event on stateless Roma in November 2017. The European Commission published a revised return handbook, which acknowledges the specific situation of stateless persons and advises States not to prolong detention if there is no prospect of removal to the country of origin.

In 2017, Luxembourg acceded to 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Moreover, 2017 amendments to the Law on Nationality of Luxembourg introduced a safeguard against statelessness at birth, in line with the 1961 Convention, as well as a facilitated procedure for the acquisition of nationality, including for stateless persons. A mapping study on statelessness was published in Austria, and studies are underway in Croatia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Moldova, Switzerland and other States.

Cooperation on statelessness with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was consolidated. In August, UNHCR and the OSCE jointly organized a study visit for Ukrainian Government officials to Serbia on the issue of stateless Roma. Furthermore, the two organizations organized a seminar in October 2017 for OSCE Member States on addressing statelessness.

In September, UNHCR participated in a conference of faith-based organizations, organized by the World Council of Churches, and in October it engaged former members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, who ultimately adopted a declaration on statelessness and migration.

Strengthening external relations and advocacy, and mobilizing support

UNHCR continued to strengthen partnerships in order to enhance joint advocacy efforts, mobilize support and resources, and counter xenophobia. Refugee food festivals were organized in 13 cities in partnership with the organization "Food Sweet Food", and with support of citizens, local authorities and private businesses. The festivals brought citizens and refugees together around a positive cultural experience.

As co-chair of the Issue-based Coalition on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, and together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR facilitated the adoption of common advocacy messages among the coalition members.

In Ukraine, UNHCR leads the protection and shelter clusters within the inter-agency framework for IDPs and maintains close partnerships with the OSCE, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and several international and national NGOs in both government-controlled and non-government controlled areas.

In South-East Europe, UNHCR has further strengthened its longstanding partnership with OSCE missions and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, with the aim of finding solutions for displaced populations from the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, in the context of the Sarajevo Process and the Skopje Process.

C. Financial information

The budget for Europe approved by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, during its sixty eighth session in October 2017, amounted to $876.3 million for 2018. By mid-January, the budget stood at $875.7 million, a slight decrease of $600,000.

Thirty-two per cent of the budget for Europe was allocated to the central Mediterranean route situation (former Europe crisis and Europe and North Africa situation), while 43 per cent was allocated for Syrian refugees.

The Ukraine situation represents 3 per cent of the overall budget. At the subregional level, 56 per cent of the overall budget was allocated to operations in eastern Europe, 5 per cent to South-eastern Europe, and 39 per cent to central, northern, southern and western Europe.

As of mid-January 2018, contributions totalling $89.3 million towards the region's 2018 financial requirements had been recorded, representing about 10 per cent of the total requirement.

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