

**CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs**  
**17 – 19 JUNE 2014 - International Conference Center Geneva**  
**Background paper – Europe Regional session**

***Tuesday 17 June 2014, Room 3 (14:30 – 18:30)***

Civil society has a vital role in working together with UNHCR and governments to set protection-sensitive policies and responses in Europe.

During this regional session, two themes will be discussed in interactive sessions: Empowerment and leadership of women of concern to UNHCR in Europe; and Access to protection in Europe: the challenges of push-backs at the borders of the European Union and our responses.

***14:30-16:15***

**Empowerment and leadership of women of concern to UNHCR in Europe**

UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy aims to ensure that all persons of concern to UNHCR enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their family members and communities. The promotion of women's participation and empowerment is critical in order to achieve this.

The Bureau for Europe supported two pilot projects in this respect; in Finland and in Malta. In Finland, refugee women played a key role in an initiative which identifies best practices being implemented by the Government of Finland and NGOs. The women highlighted the importance of fully engaging asylum-seekers and refugees:

*“We want to be heard on matters that affect us and our communities. We would like to see that those refugees, women and men, who have expertise, who can talk from experience, who are in touch with their communities, have a say and participate fully in the consultation, design and delivery process. We believe that this investment in the participation of refugees as full citizens of Finland is worth the effort, and can only be beneficial to all.”*

A report entitled “Speaking for ourselves: Hearing Refugees Voices, A journey Towards Empowerment” is available online: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/537afd9e4.html>. Hard copies will also be available at the Annual Consultations with NGOs.

In Malta, UNHCR has collaborated with Integra to identify and analyze existing gaps and capacities, with the aim to develop methodologies that can contribute towards improving the protection environment further for all persons of concern to UNHCR. It is implemented throughout direct engagement with persons of concern to UNHCR as well as through mapping of activities of mainstream stakeholders.

In this session, NGOs will share their experience, exchange relevant good practices and explore areas for enhanced cooperation with other NGOs, governments and UNHCR. It will explore the

concepts of participation, empowerment and leadership of women of concern to UNHCR, both conceptually and in practice.

**Moderator: Diane GOODMAN, Deputy Director, Bureau for Europe, UNHCR**

Based on the brief presentations by the panelists and through a set of targeted questions, the moderator will stimulate lively debate between the audience and the panelists on participation, empowerment and leadership of women of concern to UNHCR in Europe.

**Panelists:**

- **Maria PISANI, Director, Integra Foundation, Malta,** will present her work on the Participatory Action Research (PAR) conducted in Malta. Her presentation will cover the research design, the tools used and the research process. She will also discuss the challenges faced in relation to the participation, empowerment and leadership of women of concern to UNHCR in the Maltese context.
- **Razieh NIKOOMANESH, Board Member, AkiDwA, Ireland,** will set out her organisations' work and its strategy in relation to the participation, empowerment and leadership of asylum-seeking and refugee women in Ireland. She will share examples on the way AkiDwA develops refugee women's participation and representation in their communities and in decision making structures. She will also highlight possible areas of cooperation with authorities, NGOs and UNHCR in this regard.
- **Emir PRCANOVIC, Executive Director, Vasa Prava, Bosnia and Herzegovina** will share practices of legal assistance and legal aid as a way to empower women of concern to UNHCR, through enhanced access to justice and the enjoyment of social economic rights, in the Bosnian context. He will focus on women asylum-seekers, Roma, internally displaced persons and returnees. He will also share an overview the collaboration of NGOs in providing crucial psychological support and vocational training to women in need.

**Rapporteur: TBC**

**16:45-18:30**

## **Access to protection in Europe: the challenges of “push-backs” at the border of the European Union and our responses**

Concern is rising among civil society and UNHCR that several European Union countries have adopted measures at their borders to control irregular entry to their territory, effectively preventing people in need of international protection from entering and requesting asylum and subjecting them to risks of inhuman and degrading treatment by forcibly returning them from their territories. Such practices also sometimes result in family separations. Civil society and European NGOs have played an important role in monitoring, documenting and reporting these practices to ensure that the voices of persons of concern are heard.

While recognizing the need of state authorities to control their borders, mechanisms should be in place to ensure the respect for fundamental rights including the principle of *non-refoulement* whilst allowing people in need of international protection to enter the European Union and obtain access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, in accordance with international law and European legislation on asylum. To that end, UNHCR and NGOs have called on authorities to inform people who arrive at the border of their right to claim asylum and on the way applications for international protection may be lodged. They also highlighted that detention following irregular entry should be used only as last resort and for a minimum period of time. Special attention should also be paid for the adequate reception of asylum-seekers, particularly those with specific needs, such as unaccompanied minors, survivors of torture and trauma, older persons or persons with disabilities.

This session brings together representatives of UNHCR and NGOs from around Europe to share their experience, exchange monitoring and reporting practices, and explore areas for enhanced cooperation. Participants will discuss strategic collaboration in advocacy with governments to put an end to “push-backs” and ensure access to international protection in Europe. Particular emphasis will be placed on access to asylum by women, children and the elderly.

The session will be structured around the questions, which the moderators will address to each of the panelists.

### **Moderator: Vincent COCHETEL, Director, Bureau for Europe, UNHCR**

The moderator will introduce the topic of the session by highlighting some of the most pressing protection challenges of border practices and “push-backs” in Europe. Through a set of targeted questions, the moderator will then stimulate a lively debate with invited panelists and facilitate structured dialogue with the audience.

### **Panelists:**

- **Bill FRELICK, Director Refugee Program, Human Rights Watch, USA** will share the main findings of the Human Right Watch report “Containment Plan: Bulgaria’s Pushbacks and Detention of Syrian and Other Asylum Seekers and Migrants.” He will

present the main findings of this report in relation to border practices at the Turkish-Bulgarian border and Human Rights Watch's recommendations to authorities, NGOs, and UNHCR in this respect.

- **Pırl ERÇOBAN, Director, Mülteci-Der, Turkey**, will highlight the consequences of the border practices at the Greek-Turkish border on asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly women, children and the elderly. She will focus on the activities of Mülteci-Der in assisting asylum-seekers and also share her recommendations regarding the need for increased cooperation between NGOs and UNHCR in advocating with authorities to ensure that persons of concern to UNHCR have access to fair and efficient asylum procedures.
- **Ignacio DIAZ DE AGUILAR, Lawyer, Aguilar y Astorga, Spain** will cover the situation of border practices between the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta and Morocco with a particular focus on access to asylum by women, children and the elderly. Finally, he will share his views on possible areas of cooperation between NGOs and UNHCR to strengthen advocacy efforts towards authorities to ensure persons of concern are given access to fair and efficient asylum processes.

**Rapporteur: Katerine CAMILLERI, Director, Jesuit Refugee Service, Malta**