



PERMANENT MISSION OF PORTUGAL
GENEVA

United Nations High Commission for Refugees
74th session of the Executive Committee
Item 3: General Debate
Geneva, 9 October 2023

Statement by Portugal

Speaking time – 5’

Chair,

Portugal aligns with the EU statement.

Let me express our full solidarity to the victims of the terrible recent terrorist attacks against Israel. All civilians must always be protected in accordance with International Humanitarian Law.

Allow me to start by thanking the High Commissioner for his opening statement and for his lucid analysis of the many challenges in today’s world.

Unfortunately, it’s evident to say that global humanitarian needs are on the rise. Every year, the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance grows and the global funding needs also grow. The magnitude and complexity of humanitarian crises are increasingly challenging us.

The UNHCR global trends report published last June shows how more than 1 in every 74 people on Earth has been forced to flee. Alarmingly, it shows how – from the end of 2021 to the end of 2022 – an additional 19 million people have been forced to flee: this is the largest two-year increase since the UNHCR started keeping records.

Despite the growing magnitude and complexity of humanitarian crises, the UNHCR’s staff and partners have been performing a stellar work, even as operational conditions become harder and delivering assistance ever more difficult.

Portugal will keep supporting the work of UNHCR. We stress the importance of maintaining the strict independence of this institution. This independence includes free and unconstrained presentation of views of the staff to Member-States, including on the promotion of diversity and the fight against discrimination on grounds of gender, age, race or ethnic origin, nationality, migratory status, sexual orientation, identity and other protected categories.

Chair,

The UNHCR cannot face these growing humanitarian needs alone. All Member-States must reaffirm their commitment to the reception, protection, assistance and integration of refugees and other displaced or stateless people.

This should be particularly true this year, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in many ways opened the way to the 1951 Refugee Convention, by recognizing the right to seek and enjoy asylum.



PERMANENT MISSION OF PORTUGAL
GENEVA

This year we also take stock of the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and its four key objectives: (i) ease the pressures on host countries; (ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; (iii) expand access to third-country solutions; and (iv) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. We call on all States to actively participate in the 2nd Global Refugee Forum in Geneva and to be ambitious in their pledges.

Chair,

Portugal is ready to play its role.

We continue supporting people from all nationalities fleeing the war in Ukraine. We already received around 60.000 people. Our focus has been to ensure that they enjoy all their human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights.

The Portuguese Government has worked together with 117 municipalities to provide housing; budgeted over 1,5 million euros in health assistance, including vaccination against COVID, measles and tuberculosis; and provided around 45 million euros in social protection. We enrolled over 12.000 people in Portuguese language classes, almost 6.000 children in schools and facilitated over 10.000 employment contracts.

As we have done since 2015, we will continue to work closely with UNHCR on resettlement programmes which bring to Portugal around 300 refugees per year who had been settled in Egypt, Turkey and Jordan.

We will keep integrating around 1.200 Afghan citizens received in Portugal since the Taliban takeover in 2021.

Finally, we will take our share of responsibility under the EU's solidarity mechanism, rescue operations and relocation programmes in the Mediterranean, including for migrants and refugees in Lampedusa and for non-accompanied minors from refugee camps in the Greek Islands.

Chair,

Our commitment cannot end at reception. We need paradigm shifts in the way States frame asylum policies. These shifts may be achieved by legislative or by policy reforms.

In Portugal, our asylum policy is under reform. By the end of this month, we will have established a new Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum. We will separate border management from asylum procedures and put together asylum procedures with community integration. We believe that this will build a more humanist policy which fully respects human rights.

Last June, we enacted legislation to improve our definition of statelessness and to better protect stateless people. We reaffirm our commitment to UNHCR's #IBelong campaign with a view to the global eradication of statelessness.

A paradigm shift also means looking into matters which have received less attention. This includes complementary pathways, including higher education. Portugal is an active partner of the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, and we reaffirm our commitment to ensure that 15% of refugees access tertiary education by 2030.



PERMANENT MISSION OF PORTUGAL
GENEVA

Finally, we must make further efforts to ensure that mental health and psychosocial support are mainstreamed in UNHCR's work.

Chair,

Let me conclude by welcoming Angola as our newest member and by reiterating Portugal's full and unwavering support for UNHCR and all its staff, and again express our deep appreciation for its work on the ground.

Thank you.