

## Dialogue between NGOs and UNHCR in Europe – July 6th, 2020

### Minutes

#### Participants

##### NGOs :

- Action against Hunger (Marion Galissard);
- Amnesty International (Abigail Robinson);
- CARE International (Verena Allert);
- Caritas Europa (Leïla Bodeux, Floriana Polito) ;
- DRC (Sara Granlund) ;
- ECRE (Omar Al Tarsheh) ;
- European Network on Statelessness (Chris Nash);
- Global Refugee Led-Network (Syed Hasnain, Shaza Alrihawi);
- Greek Council for Refugees (Mariana Fragkou);
- HIAS (Raphael Marcus);
- ICMC (Mantalin Kyrou);
- ICVA (Loïse Daï Rocheteau, Jérôme Elie) ;
- Islam Relief Worldwide (Kate Wiggans);
- Oxfam (Raphael Shilhav);
- Save the Children (Sophia Eckert, Karen Mets).

##### UNHCR:

- Pascale Moreau, Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe;
- Nicolas Brass, Senior External Engagement Coordinator, Regional Bureau for Europe;
- Jeanette Zuefle, Chief of Protection Section, Regional Bureau for Europe;
- Sophie Magennis, Head of Legal and Policy Support Unit, Regional Representation for EU Affairs;
- Filippo Rossi, Senior Operations Coordinator, Regional Bureau for Europe;
- Florent Marty, Senior Partnership Officer, Regional Bureau for Europe.

#### Presentation of the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, overview of UNHCR's objectives and priorities and way forward - Pascal Moreau, Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe

UNHCR expressed **gratitude** to all participants for the work carried out, including in the context of COVID-19. Today's meeting is yet another opportunity for dialogue and came to light thanks to the cooperation and joint work between ICVA, ECRE and UNHCR. UNHCR is committed to deepening partnerships, around a common strategy as well as common communication and advocacy.

UNHCR's **decentralization and regionalization** process has impacted the way UNHCR delivers by bringing the Regional Bureaus closer to the point of delivery. In the last few months, UNHCR has tried to strengthen (i) Country Offices in their delivery of protection and assistance, (ii) UNHCR's capacity for communication and advocacy, (iii) UNHCR's capacity in protection expertise, within the Bureaus and in a variety of Country Offices, (iv) UNHCR's operational planning, and (v) UNHCR's emergency response. According to UNHCR's internal findings, in Europe and elsewhere, regionalization has allowed for a faster delivery in the context of the COVID-19 emergency. The Bureau is now covering directly all countries bordering the Mediterranean, namely Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain and Turkey, with a stronger oversight and capacity to support.

Triggered by the events in 2015, **UNHCR's intervention in Europe** has shifted towards a more active engagement directly with persons of concern, required by the need to enhance protection delivery in specific areas such as sexual and gender-based violence, child protection and communication with communities.

The 2015 emergency has **impacted Europe** in many ways. Since then, Europe has experienced a partially toxic debate on refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants; elements of solidarity have appeared but some have decreased over time; first-entry States to Europe, including Turkey, bear the largest burden; a sustainable reform of the European Common Asylum System has failed; migration, its issues or opportunities, has not been substantially addressed, leading to a confusion between those in need of international protection and those who are not; an urgent need to meaningfully integrate refugees in host societies has come into sight, particularly in the States on the frontline.

While refugees have overall been integrated into national health systems, including in non-EU States, the **COVID-19 emergency** has also had negative effects on the protection space, including restricted access to territory/asylum and the temporary suspension of registration of new arrivals. Certain issues were made more acute by COVID-19, such as the limited capacity of reception facilities, access to national services and to persons of concern for UNHCR (as a protective measure).

Priorities of the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, include:

- Ensuring continued and direct **access to territory and asylum** in Europe through a balance between principles and pragmatism;
- Improving the efficiency of **asylum systems** in Europe, including through fair and fast procedures and enhanced reception conditions;
- Strengthening **community-based protection**, the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence and child protection;
- Increasing **engagement with communities**, building on achievements during the COVID-19 response, in the context of which a multiplicity of media was used, allowing for a productive and diversified dialogue;
- **Including** refugees in national systems, i.a. by working on narratives and tolerance as well as socio-economic integration through partners with the relevant expertise;
- Enhancing the **visibility** of refugees and their situation, through data and analysis, including through partnerships with NGOs;
- Following-up on the High-Level Segment on **Statelessness** pledges;
- Supporting the implementation of the over 300 pledges made in Europe, including by NGOs, in the context of the **Global Refugee Forum**;
- Strengthening **partnerships** with NGOs, municipalities, private sector, financial institutions, UN actors;
- Pursuing a **geographical focus** on the Western Balkans and external borders of the EU, namely Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Spain, Turkey, and Ukraine.

## Questions and answers

- **Development and impact of the recent UNHCR paper presenting good practices and practical recommendations in the COVID-19 context <sup>1</sup> and potential joint development of such tool with NGOs (ICVA, Jérôme Elie):**

(UNHCR) This document was put together by the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe based on inputs from UNHCR Offices in Europe and partners. Following the publication, States have reached out to UNHCR to seek support in the implementation of identified good practices/recommendations. UNHCR is interested in developing joint papers with NGOs in the future provided progress can be made on discussing strategic cooperation on particular themes and/or Operations.

- **Implementation of Global Refugee Forum (GRF) pledges in Europe (ICVA, Jérôme Elie):**

(UNHCR) The follow-up on domestic pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum will be made at the country-level by UNHCR Country Representatives whereas global pledges will be followed up by the GRF coordination team. They will reach out to stakeholders to seek support.

- **Impact of COVID-19 on pledges related to resettlement (ICVA, Jérôme Elie):**

(UNHCR) In the context of COVID-19, some departures and arrivals are expected to take place in 2021. The EU Commission has confirmed that its financial support planned for 2020 to Member States admitting resettled refugees will be carried over to 2021.

- **UNHCR's role with regard to the adoption of a predictable temporary solidarity mechanism in Europe (Caritas Europa, Leïla Bodeux):**

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, *Practical Recommendations and Good Practice to Address Protection Concerns in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 9/04/2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2020/04/Practical-Recommendations-and-Good-Practice-to-Address-Protection-Concerns-in-the-COVID-19-Context-April-2020.pdf>

(UNHCR) UNHCR, jointly with IOM, has been actively advocating in favour of such mechanism. UNHCR is concerned that disembarkations continue to be negotiated ad-hoc, take time and therefore put people at risk.

- **Alignment of the upcoming EU pact on migration and asylum with the Global Compact on Refugees and its inclusion of statelessness issues** ([Save the Children](#), Karin Mets & the [European Network on Statelessness](#), Chris Nash):

(UNHCR) The EU Pact on migration and asylum will cover a lot of the ground which is core to the Global Compact on Refugees, such as solidarity, resettlement, capacity-building of asylum systems. UNHCR has shared with the EU its key recommendations with regard to the Pact<sup>2</sup>. UNHCR hopes the EU will adopt a holistic approach, including statelessness. Once the EU Pact is published, a dialogue will be launched on the content.

- **Border monitoring in the Balkans** ([Save the Children](#), Karin Mets):

(UNHCR) UNHCR is not per se against border procedures, as long as individual cases are examined and due access to protection and asylum is ensured. UNHCR will continue to gather and analyze data on borders and access to territory/asylum. UNHCR has strengthened the capacities of its Country Operations in the Western Balkans. UNHCR should move beyond monitoring and advocacy, to more concrete support for States involved in order to build systems that will allow these States to also contribute to the hosting of refugees which is a duty for all.

- **Consultation of refugees in the development of the Regional Bureau's priorities and channels of communication between refugees and the Regional Bureau** ([Global Refugee Led-Network](#), Syed Hasnain):

(UNHCR) UNHCR's priorities in Europe are based on the situation on the ground, on the analyses in countries where UNHCR has Offices reaching out to refugees. Avenues to communicate with communities were strengthened in the context of COVID-19, for both information-sharing and feedback purposes. It will continue to be strengthened notably at country level.

- **UNHCR's engagement with faith-based institutions** ([Islam Relief Worldwide](#), Kate Wiggans):

(UNHCR) There are numerous contacts between UNHCR and faith-based organizations, with the level of engagement depending on the outreach capacities and priorities of Country Offices. UNHCR is committed to explore partnerships with faith-based organizations, maybe starting with a paper presenting positive examples, notably in the larger frame of its inclusion/ integration strategy (recognizing the role played by FBOs, along with other local actors, in terms of reception and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers).

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<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Recommendations : For the European Commission's proposed Pact on migration and asylum*, 01/2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/euroseries/5e60d1847/unhcr-recommendations-european-commissions-proposed-pact-migration-asylum.html>

### Way forward

- Building on this event, ensure regular regional interactions between UNHCR and NGO/CSOs, through quarterly dialogues;
- Explore the option of establishing dedicated UNHCR-NGOs groups around specific themes identified as being of common interest, including in the context of this first Dialogue, with a view to discuss and define key actions to be implemented jointly or in complementarity;
- Share an online survey with all participants to inform further the next steps/exchanges;
- Explore how UNHCR and NGOs can work together on data and analysis to increase the visibility of refugees and their situation;
- Share, with the NGOs, an organigram of the key focal points within the Regional Bureau.

***UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, ICVA and ECRE***

*13 July 2020*