

**UNHCR Observations
on the occasion of the
First Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting on Migration
Algarve, 18-19 November 2007**

International migration continues to grow in scale and complexity. Among the many people on the move, there are refugees and others in need of international protection -- persons for whom UNHCR has a distinct mandate. The global refugee protection regime is premised on the international community's recognition of the specific rights and needs of refugees, and the concomitant obligations of States, including not to return refugees to countries where their life or liberty would be at risk. UNHCR encourages the Ministerial Meeting, within the framework of its broader discussions on migration, to reaffirm its commitment to these important principles, as was done by the Conferences in Rabat (July 2006) and Tripoli (November 2006).

Comprehensive approaches to migration need to encompass international protection responsibilities. UNHCR urges the Meeting to acknowledge that migration management must take due account of international refugee protection obligations, including the importance of identifying people in need of international protection and determining appropriate solutions for them. The root causes of refugee flows have to be addressed, to enable voluntary repatriation to take place. Moreover, increased participation of EU Member States in refugee resettlement would be an important signal of international solidarity, as well as a contribution to durable solutions.

Measures to curb irregular migration must not prevent refugees from having access to international protection. While refugees and asylum-seekers account for a small proportion of the global movement of people, they often travel alongside others, whose reasons for leaving their country are not protection-related. UNHCR calls on the Ministerial Meeting to affirm that measures taken to curb irregular migration, whether by land, sea, or air must not prevent persons who are seeking international protection from gaining access to the territory and asylum procedure of countries where protection can be found. In addition, UNHCR urges States to acknowledge the particular vulnerability of refugees and asylum-seekers to human trafficking, and to develop specific measures to protect victims of trafficking, especially women and children.

When given the opportunity, refugees can be agents of development. Refugee influxes are often seen as having negative consequences for the development of host countries and communities. Yet refugees can also be agents of development, if they are given the opportunity to put their skills and productive capacities to use. UNHCR encourages countries participating in the Ministerial Meeting to enable refugees to

lead productive lives. Moreover, there is growing evidence that refugees, especially those living in industrialized countries, transfer significant sums to members of their families and communities, both in countries of origin and in other countries. Reducing the transaction costs of migrant remittances will also benefit refugees and their families and communities of origin.

Supporting the integration of refugees can maximize the development impact of migration and promote social cohesion. Refugees face racism and xenophobia in many parts of the world, and are often at risk of being marginalized in society and the economy. UNHCR encourages the Ministerial Meeting to reaffirm the need to counter all forms of intolerance and exclusion, and to take active measures to promote the socio-economic participation of non-nationals, including refugees. UNHCR urges countries participating in the Meeting to allow labour market access for asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, and to take the necessary steps to assess and recognize their qualifications. Refugees are frequently separated from their family members, a fact which often impedes their integration. UNHCR calls on countries of asylum to facilitate the reunification of refugee families.

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