



UNHCR Statement ahead of the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting, 8 - 9 October 2015

UNHCR encourages the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council to take further action towards a holistic response to the refugee and migrant situation. This approach should build on the relocation scheme, ensure the provision of adequate reception capacity, and increase legal avenues for people in need of protection to reach Europe in safety and dignity. "The EU and its Member States need to continue to build a strong response, addressing immediate needs, but also future challenges to stabilize the situation," said Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR's Director of the Bureau for Europe.

UNHCR welcomed the European Commission's proposals released on 9 September 2015 to address the current refugee crisis in Europe, and the decisions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council for the relocation of 160,000 asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy. These proposals are timely, as more than half a million refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea so far in 2015. While the relocation scheme will assist in addressing some of the immediate effects of this situation, this scheme is an interim emergency measure. UNHCR welcomes the proposal for a permanent relocation programme.

The relocation scheme will not be able to function without the full registration of all arrivals. Sufficient reception capacity in the initial identification and registration phases to enable people to stay for the period required is also critical. In addition, adequate integration support is necessary for persons in their country of relocation to ensure the success of the programme and prevent potential secondary movements. UNHCR calls for a substantial and rapid increase in legal opportunities for refugees to access the EU and elsewhere. In Europe, such opportunities could include enhanced resettlement and humanitarian admission, family reunification, private sponsorship, and humanitarian and student visas. "Increasing legal pathways for those needing protection will help reduce onward movements," Cochetel said.

Many of those who have recently arrived in Europe have left close relatives behind in countries of first asylum. Significant efforts need to be made to boost the capacity to process family reunion claims and streamline and accelerate the process, so that separated family members are not compelled to embark on dangerous journeys. Creating such avenues will also help to address international efforts to address smuggling and trafficking. UNHCR calls on Member States to make use of the possibilities offered by the EU Family Reunification Directive so as to include a broader range of family members who often live in the same household in the country of origin, including elderly parents and dependent unmarried female children between 18 to 25 years of age.

With regard to the European Return policy, UNHCR supports the strengthening of mechanisms for the return, in dignity and safety, of people not in need of international protection, with the support of Frontex and IOM. Returns need to be carried out in a safe, orderly manner and in compliance with international and human rights law.

UNHCR has stepped up its operations in countries affected by the current refugee flows and is ready to support the European Union and its Member States, and other stakeholders, in effectively responding to the present situation.

7 October 2015