



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

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**Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
“Humanitarian Issues and Other Commitments”
Warsaw, 28 September 2015**

Distinguished Chairperson,
Dear Participants,

Flight and forced displacement are among the most serious humanitarian and human rights challenges worldwide. During 2014, new and unresolved conflicts were the cause of mass displacement. This is also a sad reality in the OSCE region. Addressing these issues is very timely given the sheer magnitude, scope, and complexity of current displacement and statelessness challenges around the world.

While the OSCE is not a humanitarian organization, the number of existing OSCE commitments relating to migration, statelessness, refugees, and internal displacement is impressive. Let me remind you that since 1989, the OSCE has adopted 16 decisions and declarations which lay down these commitments.¹

Such commitments are critical, as we are contending with a multiplication of concurrent emergencies around the world. The number of people displaced by conflict has reached levels unseen since the end of the Second World War. Today, almost 60 million people are forcibly displaced, of whom nearly 20 million are refugees, and over half are children².

When we look at last year's statistics in the OSCE area, we see a similar trend: the numbers have risen to more than 7.2 million displaced persons by the end of 2014. This includes more than 3.5 million refugees, nearly 900,000 asylum-seekers, 2 million IDPs, and more than 630,000 stateless persons. Looking at these numbers and considering the 40th anniversary of the OSCE Helsinki Final Act, this is an opportune moment to revitalize, update and strengthen OSCE commitments relating to migration, statelessness, refugees, and internal displacement.

With the IDP situation in Ukraine and the refugee situation in the Mediterranean countries, humanitarian emergencies are happening right at the heart of the OSCE region. As of 7 September, there are 1.46 million registered IDPs in Ukraine. With winter approaching fast, the humanitarian situation is of grave concern with freedom of movement and humanitarian access restricted, limiting the delivery of assistance to those most in need.

UNHCR continues to monitor the situation of Ukrainian refugees in neighboring countries. According to government sources in receiving countries, the total number of people seeking

¹ Vienna 1989, Helsinki 1992, Stockholm 1992, Rome 1993, Budapest 1994, Lisbon 1996, Oslo 1998, Istanbul 1999, Bucharest 2001, Maastricht 2003, Sofia 2004, Ljubljana 2005, Brussels 2006, Madrid 2007, Athens 2009, Vilnius 2011.

² UNHCR *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014*, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>

asylum or other forms of legal stay in neighboring countries now stands at 1,123,800³ with the vast majority going to the Russian Federation (911,500), followed by Belarus (126,450).

Also the situation in the Mediterranean Sea continues to be dramatic. So far in 2015, approx. 2,750 refugees and migrants are estimated to have died or gone missing. The large majority of the 381,000 people who crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Europe as of 11 September are fleeing from war, conflict or persecution, making the Mediterranean crisis primarily a refugee emergency.

Tens of thousands of refugees and migrants making their way from Greece into the Western Balkans are a symptom of a much wider problem, affecting Europe as a whole. All European countries and the EU must act together in response to the growing emergency and demonstrate responsibility and solidarity with those countries whose capacities are already overstretched, such as Greece, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary.

With so many people on the move, we see more and more often how the issue of human trafficking intersects with that of forced displacement and refugee protection. The implications of this growing phenomenon are far-reaching and call for a comprehensive approach. This must be based on the understanding that security and protection are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, criminal law enforcement against traffickers must go hand in hand with the protection of trafficked persons and a humanitarian approach to those people on the move.

Let me draw attention to the fact that a humanitarian crisis is not only caused by conflict, violence and human rights violations but also by lack of funding to address the basic needs of those displaced in first countries of asylum. As the Syrian conflict enters into its fifth year, 4 million refugees in neighbouring countries continue to live in desperate conditions. For 2015 as a whole, UNHCR and partners appealed for USD 5.5 billion to address the most basic needs. However, as of September 2015, only 37% of the requested funds have been received. The worsening living conditions, food cuts, and the lack of prospects for a resolution to the conflict in the near future are driving growing numbers of refugees towards Europe and the OSCE region.

The contribution of OSCE participating States in providing protection and assistance in emergencies, with support from UNHCR and its partners, is therefore critical. Some of the groundwork for this was established through the broadened scope of cooperation in the renewed Memorandum of Understanding between OSCE/ODIHR and UNHCR, signed in March of this year. This MoU not only extended the timeframe for our collaboration, but also expanded the fields of cooperation between ODIHR's human dimension work and UNHCR's international protection mandate.

We urge participating States to prioritize measures implementing OSCE commitments focused on protection, saving lives and addressing root causes of forced displacement. As

³ UNHCR Operational Update, 4 August – 7 September 2015, available at: <http://unhcr.org.ua/attachments/article/1299/UNHCR%20UKRAINE%20Operational%20update%2007SEP15.pdf>

the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Mr. Volker Türk, pointed out in his keynote address at the Special Human Dimension event on refugees and IDPs in July⁴, it is time to revisit discussions that took place in the 1980s and 90s in seeking solutions to the causes of displacement. The “*Root Causes of Displacement*” is the theme UNHCR has chosen for the *High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges* in Geneva in December 2015.

One way to meaningfully address a root cause is by ending statelessness. In the past, OSCE and UNHCR have jointly raised awareness and assisted governments to prevent and reduce statelessness, in particular in Central Asia. We have also cooperated to enhance access to civil registration and documentation for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the Western Balkans. Almost a year ago, UNHCR launched the campaign #IBELONG to end statelessness within the next decade. The Campaign expands on specific Actions to prevent new cases of statelessness from emerging, notably at birth, to resolve existing major situations of statelessness and to better identify and protect stateless persons. The Campaign has received high level support from around the world, including from Nobel Peace Laureates, world opinion leaders and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ms. Astrid Thors.

Our ongoing cooperation with the OSCE has garnered positive results in the past year. UNHCR has closely collaborated with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Based on our Operational Agreement regular information-sharing, and capacity-building activities on IDP issues are ongoing. A good example of collaboration is the joint OSCE-UNHCR *Protection Checklist*⁵, which was distributed to the Monitoring Officers in a pocket-sized version and is used for trainings in different locations in Ukraine.

The “Protection Checklist” has also been useful in other situations. It was, for instance, used in the *Displaced Persons Simulation Exercise* on a potential influx situation of Afghan refugees, jointly run by the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre and UNHCR for field staff in Central Asia in May. It will also be rolled out with OSCE staff in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, including the Caucasus.

However, much remains to be done. By further strengthening our relationship, there will be a possibility of protecting and assisting refugees and displaced persons in the OSCE region in a more comprehensive way already at the outset of humanitarian crises. We invite participating States to reiterate their support and effort by showing their commitment to finding solutions for what is arguably one of the most crucial humanitarian issues of the last century.

Thank you!

*UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE
and Vienna-based UN Agencies
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⁴ The OSCE Special Human Dimension event on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of IDPs and Refugees took place in Vienna on 6 July 2015.

⁵ The joint OSCE-UNHCR *Protection Checklist addressing displacement and protection of displaced populations and affected communities along the conflict cycle*, <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/111464>.