



OSCE Human Dimension Seminar

Improving OSCE effectiveness by enhancing its co-operation with relevant regional and international organizations

12-14 May 2014, Warsaw

UNHCR Statement

Distinguished Chairperson,

Dear participants,

I would like to thank the organizers for convening this meeting and take the opportunity to make a contribution on behalf of UNHCR. As requested by the organizers, I will try to identify specific challenges, best practices, and possible opportunities for enhancing the cooperation between OSCE and UNHCR. To illustrate our valuable collaboration, I will focus on one specific activity.

First, let me start with a brief overview:

UNHCR and OSCE have a long-standing history of collaborating on a variety of issues, but especially on topics concerning the human dimension, conflict prevention and solution, and displacement. In 1998, UNHCR and OSCE signed a Memorandum of Understanding, in order to achieve maximum synergy and complementarity in the pursuit of their objectives. In this Memorandum of Understanding, both sides agreed to establish regular channels for exchanging information, and to undertake joint assessments of the situation in areas of common concern. Another Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2011 between ODIHR and UNHCR, laying down their cooperative activities aiming at combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance in the OSCE region.

Since this formalization of collaboration, 16 years have passed and the joint collaboration between UNHCR and the OSCE has intensified and made considerable progress. Today, joint activities of collaboration include: co-moderating the Geneva International Discussions, holding trainings for border guards at the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, implementing the Regional Housing Programme for Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Western Balkans, jointly advocating for the protection of human rights of persons of concern and national minorities such as Roma and Sinti, and drawing attention to the plight of displaced people within the OSCE region, including the constant flow of Syrian refugees to OSCE participating States and Partners for Cooperation.

Let me now come to the challenges as a second point:

Forced displacement, be it refugees or IDPs, is among the most serious humanitarian and human rights challenges worldwide. Conflicts, violence and human rights abuses continue to uproot an increasing number of people around the world. By mid-2013, the total population of concern to UNHCR, including refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, stood at 38.7 million. Also in the OSCE region, newly developing displacement situations pose serious challenges, in addition to already existing protracted situations due to frozen conflicts.

At this very moment, we are witnessing a growing number of displaced persons within Ukraine, who are in need of protection and assistance, because they have lost their homes, properties, entitlements to social services, and the possibility to be self-sustainable. Measures to prevent or mitigate the risk of forced displacement as well as to prevent violations of displaced persons' human rights are at the heart of OSCE's and UNHCR's activities despite their different mandates. Therefore, our timely and appropriate response to persons in need is essential, including smooth collaboration between all key partners, and clearly defined mandates, roles and capacities of each organization. This, however, is easier said than done, especially in times of crises.

In light of this – and this brings me to my third point, the examples of best practice and the one activity I want to focus on – UNHCR and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center have jointly developed the Protection Checklist, which addresses the displacement of refugees and IDPs, and protection of displaced populations and affected communities along the conflict cycle. The Protection Checklist is an important tool towards the implementation of the 2011 Vilnius OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on the Conflict Cycle. It was jointly launched by the OSCE Secretary General, Lamberto Zannier, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, in February 2014. [<http://www.refworld.org/docid/530b060d4.html>].

It is intended for OSCE field staff as well as other OSCE actors who work on displacement issues or who might be confronted with protection challenges arising from conflict situations. It is a practical reference tool that clearly identifies the actions that OSCE field operations can and should take in a given situation, within their mandates. The lists of possible actions illustrate the valuable contributions the OSCE can make, acting in close cooperation with UNHCR and other relevant actors, to effectively prevent, monitor and address forced displacement in the OSCE area.

The Protection Checklist is an excellent opportunity for enhancing the cooperation between OSCE and UNHCR in the near future.

This brings me to my last point, a brief outlook on the time to come:

CPC and UNHCR are currently looking into the possibility of organizing joint briefings for the Special Monitoring Officers in Ukraine to enhance their monitoring capacities on displacement issues, so they can share relevant information with UNHCR and other actors on the ground. In addition, an official roll-out of the Protection Checklist is planned for 2014 and 2015 in the regions of Central Asia, Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, including the Caucasus.

In close collaboration with OSCE, UNHCR will continue mainstreaming protection and displacement issues into the OSCE's three security dimensions and strongly advocate for finding durable solutions for persons of concern.

Thank you.