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**UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations**  
**Statement to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**OSCE Permanent Council**  
**17 March 2022**

Mister Chairman, Permanent Representatives,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you today on the crisis in Ukraine.

Since 24 February, close to 13 million people have been affected by the conflict, and at least 2 million persons forced to flee within Ukraine<sup>1</sup>, or stranded, fearing for their lives. Almost three weeks into this unprecedented humanitarian crisis, escalating violence continues to displace more families.

It must also be recalled that prior to the start of the present crisis, Ukraine was already hosting almost 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Donbas region, in addition to 1.7 million conflict-affected people.

Permanent Representatives,

In addition to the internally displaced, over the past three weeks more than 3 million people have fled into Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Women and children - who constitute some 90% of those who have fled - talk about their separation from family and loved ones; their shock and disbelief and countless human tragedies. But they also express gratitude for the extreme generosity and support they receive from Governments and people. Governments have kept their borders open, volunteers have been rushing to border areas to help and the EU activated - for the first time in its history - the Temporary Protection Directive. This will enable refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people arriving from Ukraine to quickly regularize their legal status, alleviating pressure on asylum systems. It shall also enable refugees to find work, access services, and benefit from social protection. Such temporary protection has also been announced by the governments of the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Brazil and others.

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<sup>1</sup> Operational Data Portal on the Ukraine Refugee Situation: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

Permanent Representatives,

In Ukraine, since the early days of this crisis, UNHCR committed to stay and deliver, and this is what we have done. Allow me to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude and admiration for our colleagues who have remained in Ukraine, but also to the whole humanitarian community. I want to pay particular tribute to our national colleagues, who face the added burden of having their families and friends in harm's way.

To facilitate the provision of life-saving assistance to the population most in needs in Ukraine, we have adjusted our operational presence, relocating to the Western and Central part of the country where warehouses have been established. This spans from emergency shelter assistance to critical core relief items such as blankets, kitchen sets, plastic sheets, jerrycans and other items, including more specialized items donated by our private sector partners.

Protection services also remain of paramount importance, and we continue to facilitate access to legal aid, but also psychosocial support and other assistance to the most vulnerable individuals, especially children and women at heightened risks in displacement contexts. Where conditions allow, we also distribute multi-purpose cash to help people make choices best suited to their needs. Flexible forms of assistance are crucial, as are innovative approaches. We have put in place a supermarket voucher programme in the western part of Ukraine, which allows IDPs to meet basic food needs. We are now looking to expand this programme to other parts of the country - and we will continue to innovate and adapt in response to a volatile situation.

UNHCR also continues to play a critical role within the Humanitarian Country team, leading the Protection as well as the Shelter and Non-Food Items Clusters since December 2014. Since 2 March, we have also been leading the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster.

Permanent Representatives,

The capacities of countries of asylum are being stretched. While EU host countries are receiving support from the rest of the Union, we are particularly concerned about the situation in Moldova, where over 340,000 people have arrived, constituting an enormous pressure. This refugee crisis comes on top of pre-existing challenges. It is therefore crucial that sufficient resources are made available fast to support the government's response.

While some new arrivals are not staying in immediate neighboring countries and intend to continue further their journey in order to reunite with family elsewhere in Europe, many are also joining families which have long settled in neighboring countries. This is particularly the case in Poland which has received over 1.8 million refugees to date and whose generosity

and management of the response have been impressive. However, with time passing and resources diminishing, the number of refugees needing integration will rise. They and the states that host them, will need support to ensure their inclusion in all sectors of public life - health and education, access to labor and other services.

Permanent Representatives,

All international support to the response is coordinated under the refugee coordination model led by UNHCR which has been established in Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, as well as in other countries in the region. The sum of collective expertise and support will be critical to help the refugee population. All actors are strengthening their assistance in a coordinated manner and working in synergy to support host countries provide shelter, emergency relief items, cash assistance, and mental health and psychosocial support to those who fled Ukraine, including people with specific needs, such as unaccompanied children.

UNHCR has also ramped-up its response by deploying over 200 experts and established field presence in all countries. UNHCR staff on the ground undertake regular protection monitoring - at the main border crossing points, transit centers and reception centers and other locations where refugees pass or gather - to assess protection risks and assist the authorities in addressing them. For this purpose, a Protection Monitoring Tool has been rolled out in all the countries.

This is not only a complex refugee crisis of enormous proportion, but it is also a child protection crisis and a family separation crisis. With the arrival of so many young women refugees and children, we are extremely preoccupied by the risks of human trafficking as well as child abuse and exploitation. We are working with government authorities, national organizations, and service providers to reduce the risk of trafficking and ensure access to anti-trafficking services - including around establishing vetting systems, or similar procedures - for organisations and private companies providing support to refugees. UNHCR is also rolling out the Blue Dots Help Desks together with UNICEF. This initiative was developed back in 2016 during the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe. The Blue Dots are safe spaces that serve as one-stop-shops which provide protection services for children, families and others with specific needs, in support of government services efforts.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) is a key, cross-cutting priority in this response. UNHCR and partners are disseminating key information and awareness raising messages to alert refugees of the risks of trafficking, exploitation and abuse. In total, UNHCR mobilized close to 60 protection experts (community-based protection, child protection, gender-based violence, accountability for affected population and PSEA specialists) of which

28 have already been deployed. We are working closely with other agencies and NGOs with relevant mandates and much-needed expertise to contribute. We also coordinate with WFP for the logistical support and positioning of aid.

In addition to Ukrainian refugees, there are also many third country nationals fleeing. While we are working to ensure access to territory - stressing that all people, irrespective of race or nationality, must be able to flee - IOM is leading on support to them and with respective governments in countries of arrival and origin to facilitate solutions.

Permanent Representatives,

Responding to this crisis requires significant funding and I would like to reiterate extreme gratitude to Governments which made generous pledges to the \$1.1 billion Flash Appeal for the response inside Ukraine and the \$550.6 million towards UNHCR-led Regional Refugee Response Plan launched together on 1 March<sup>2</sup>. We are now fleshing out the Refugee Response Plan and will present a more detailed version by the end of the month. Financial requirements are expected to be much higher than those presented on 1 March as the needs continue to grow. This is why it will be critical to convert the pledges into contributions which we hope to be as flexible as possible in terms of earmarking.

Let me also express the sincerest gratefulness for the tremendous support received from private citizens, and from the private sector demonstrating once again that they stand with refugees. Since 24 February, private sector donors have contributed over \$200 million to UNHCR alone for the Ukraine situation, while individuals have given \$84 million.

I would like to close my remarks by a reiterated word of immense gratitude to all of you present today. While the path remains uncertain and we will surely have difficult days ahead, UNHCR will continue to rely on your active engagement on behalf of the millions of refugees we are committed to protect and assist.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.unhcr.org/ukraine-emergency.html> and <https://reporting.unhcr.org/>