



**UNHCR Contribution to the  
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

**Working Session 7: “Humanitarian issues and other commitments”**

**Warsaw, 22 September 2016**

Distinguished Chairperson,  
Dear Participants,

Today, according to the UN Secretary General, a record number of 130 million people are dependent on humanitarian assistance to survive<sup>1</sup>. Children, women and men face impossible choices every day. These people are parents who must choose between buying food or medicine for their children; families who must risk bombing at home or a perilous escape by sea.

2015 will be remembered as the year when global forced displacement reached its peak since the aftermath of World War II. By the end of the year, 65.3 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. These are 5.8 million more than 2014. The total of 65.3 million comprises 3.2 million asylum-seekers, 21.3 million refugees, and 40.8 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Measured against Earth’s 7.4 billion population, these numbers mean that 1 in every 113 people globally is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee.

Recent developments in the OSCE region mirror these challenges. By the end of 2015, there were 10 million persons of concern to UNHCR within the OSCE area. Over 4.8 million of them are refugees, 2.8 million IDPs, 1.6 million asylum-seekers and nearly 722,500 stateless people. The IDP situation in Ukraine and the situation of refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach safer shores in Europe continue to be the main humanitarian crises in the OSCE region.

The ongoing conflict in and around Ukraine primarily impacts on civilians, as shown by the reports of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). Internal displacement has become a major issue that is most likely to transform the local political, economic, social and environmental context on the long term. As of end-2015, there were nearly 1.7 million IDPs in Ukraine registered with government authorities. UNHCR continues to monitor the situation of Ukrainian IDPs as well as refugees in neighboring countries. According to government sources in receiving countries, the total number of Ukrainians seeking asylum or other forms of legal stay in neighboring countries as of 15 July 2016 stands at 1,400,668, with the majority in the Russian Federation (1,092,212) and Belarus (139,194).

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<sup>1</sup> UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on World Humanitarian Day (19 August 2016).

The plight of refugees is epitomized by the dramatic situation in the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea. As of 23 August 2016, 268,602 people arrived by sea this year, the majority of them coming from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. They flee from war, conflict or persecution, making this crisis primarily a refugee emergency. During the first half of 2016, there have been 2,896 persons reported dead or missing at sea, which surpasses the number of those lost during the first half of 2015 which was 1,847. UNHCR welcomes the productive work of the OSCE Informal Working Group (IWG) Focusing on the Issue of Migration and Refugee Flows. From its beginning in March 2016, the UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN Agencies took an active part in the meetings of the IWG and the Office will continue to follow its outcomes with great interest.

Statelessness remains a pressing issue at a global level, but also in the OSCE region. At the end of 2015, there were nearly 722,500 stateless people in the OSCE region, most of them to be found in Europe and Central Asia. Stateless people often lack enjoyment of basic human rights that most of us take for granted: they are denied a legal identity, access to education, health care, official marriage and job opportunities and even the dignity of an official burial and a death certificate when they die. Many pass on the curse of statelessness to their children. The #IBelong Campaign was launched in November 2014. Together with States, civil society and other UN Agencies, UNHCR aims to end statelessness by 2024 by resolving existing statelessness, preventing new cases from emerging and better identifying and protecting stateless populations. As largest regional security organization, OSCE is a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation of 57 participating States and 11 Partners for Cooperation, which can add considerable value to the #IBelong Campaign.

On the scourge of trafficking in human beings, UNHCR has a responsibility to ensure that refugees, IDPs, stateless persons and other persons of concern do not become victims of human trafficking, and must ensure that individuals who have been trafficked are afforded protection (either by recognizing them as refugees or by referring them to appropriate actors). Cooperation between OSCE Institutions, such as ODIHR, and the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and UNHCR on this topic has been fostered over the last years, notably through the OSCE Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons and its Expert Coordination Team (AECT). UNHCR also contributed to the launch event of the OSCE project “Combating Human Trafficking Along Migration Routes”.

The refugee flows, internal displacement, statelessness, trafficking in human beings constitute shared interests for UNHCR and the OSCE. These issues require not only cooperation between States, but also between international organizations as well as with civil society, NGOs, and the private sector. While the OSCE is not a humanitarian organization, the number of existing OSCE commitments relating to the aforementioned issues is impressive.

While the numbers of people forcibly displaced across the world continue to rise, the funds available for humanitarian aid are not keeping up with the rapidly expanding needs. For 2016 as a whole, UNHCR and partners appealed for USD 6.5 billion to address the most basic needs<sup>2</sup>. As of 31 January 2016, the annual budget was increased to USD 7.3 billion; however,

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<sup>2</sup> See UNHCR Global Appeal 2016-2017, Needs and funding requirements, <http://www.unhcr.org/ga16/index.xml>

as of August 2016, only USD 3.2 billion were available<sup>3</sup>. This adds to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and highlights the need for more transnational cooperation on humanitarian issues.

UNHCR's ongoing cooperation with the OSCE has garnered positive results in the past year. Among others, UNHCR closely collaborated with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Based on an Operational Agreement signed in 2014, regular information-sharing and capacity-building activities on IDP issues are ongoing. The joint OSCE-UNHCR *Protection Checklist*<sup>4</sup> was distributed to SMM Monitoring Officers as well as for OSCE field staff and was used for trainings in different locations. After a successful Protection Checklist training in the form of a joint OSCE Conflict Prevention Center-UNHCR Displaced Persons Simulation Exercise for OSCE and UNHCR field staff in Central Asia (Dushanbe, May 2015), the same exercise was repeated in the South-Eastern region (Sarajevo, October 2015) and, upon request by the OSCE Mission to Serbia, also at national level (Belgrade, February 2016).

The Regional Housing Programme (RHP) implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia proved to be a fruitful cooperation between UNHCR, OSCE, the European Commission, the Council of Europe Development Bank as well as OSCE participating States. The RHP contributes to resolve the issue of forced displacement (especially internal displacement) following the 1991-1995 conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia, by providing durable and sustainable housing solutions. More than 200 families moved into new homes in 2015, after 20 years of displacement and dire living conditions. Construction works are now ongoing in all four Partner Countries and more than 1,800 beneficiary families have been selected by the Partner Countries. With the current pace of implementation, the number of housing units that will be delivered in 2016 is expected to triple compared to 2015<sup>5</sup>.

At a global level, the topic of forced displacement and refugee protection will remain one of the biggest challenges the international community has to solve. The first-ever United Nations Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants on 19 September 2016 was a "game changer"<sup>6</sup> that will enhance protection for those forcibly displaced and otherwise on the move. UNHCR welcomes the historic adoption of the New York Declaration by 193 governments, which includes commitments common to refugees and migrants, such as the protection of human rights of all refugees and migrants, the strong condemnation of racism and xenophobia, the support to those countries rescuing, receiving and hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants, the guarantee of access to education for refugee and migrant children as well as the development of a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework<sup>7 8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> See UNHCR Global Focus, Financials, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/financial>.

<sup>4</sup> 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>.

<sup>5</sup> See RHP Highlights 2015/2016, <http://www.regionalhousingprogramme.org/news-and-publications.html>

<sup>6</sup> See UNHCR News, 06 September 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/9/57ceb07e4/un-summit-game-changer-refugee-migrant-protection.html>

<sup>7</sup> See UNHCR News, "UNHCR welcomes 'unprecedented force and resonance' of New York Declaration", 19 September 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/9/57dff34f4/unhcr-welcomes-unprecedented-force-resonance-new-york-declaration.html>

<sup>8</sup> See the full text of the New York Declaration, <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration>

UNHCR also very much welcomes the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis on 20 September 2016 convened by US President Obama, which provided an opportunity for governments to make concrete commitments in funding to humanitarian appeals and international organizations, to admitting more refugees through resettlement and other pathways, and increasing refugees' self-reliance and inclusion through work and education opportunities. As UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said on 20 September 2016, "UNHCR is hugely encouraged to see the strong political commitments in the New York Declaration made immediately tangible through the new, concrete actions announced by governments today"<sup>9</sup>.

The outcomes of these Summits will provide opportunities within the global migration governance architecture for the OSCE as regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

There is a pressing imperative for the international community to join efforts to tackle the root causes of forced displacement and address the protection needs that arise from it. Strengthened international and regional frameworks for cooperation and response are critical, drawing on the collective actions of traditional and non-traditional actors. Such actions would enhance the existing efforts of States to humanely address large-scale population movements, reduce the disproportionate burden borne by a limited number of States and provide genuine opportunities for people in need of protection to access it through safe and predictable avenues. It was for such challenges that the international refugee protection system was created. It is in the collective interest of the international community as a whole to ensure that it operates effectively in all regions of the world.

Thank you!

*UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE  
and Vienna-based UN Agencies  
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<sup>9</sup> See UNHCR News, "UNHCR welcomes new support for refugees at Leaders' Summit", 20 September 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/9/57e2481e8/unhcr-welcomes-new-support-refugees-leaders-summit.html>