



## OSCE-UNHCR Webinar Series on

### **Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Migrants and Refugees: Importance of Alliances and Consolidated Approaches**

Zoom online event, 17 December 2021, 10:00 – 13:00h CET

The topic “Combating intolerance and discrimination against migrants and refugees” is linked to the mandate and work of both, the OSCE as largest regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter and its comprehensive security approach, and UNHCR in the exercise of providing international protection to refugees and other persons of concern.

After the successful ODIHR-UNHCR-RFoM webinar on “*Combating hate speech and toxic narratives about migrants and refugees*” held in July 2020 with the participation of OSCE and UNHCR field staff, and considering increasing incidents of intolerance, discrimination, hate speech and hate crime against migrants and refugees, the OSCE Secretariat (External Co-operation Section), the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) agreed to jointly organize a series of webinars throughout 2021.

The four partner institutions focused this year on the following specific topics: (i) social media (held in March 2021), (ii) shaping positive public perceptions and attitudes towards migrants and refugees in host societies (May 2021), and (iii) access to and use of media by refugees and migrants (July 2021).

The three webinars in 2021 brought together representatives of OSCE, UNHCR, including field staff, and invited experts with a view to take stock of existing approaches and activities, to exchange experiences, identify good practices and lessons learned and potential opportunities for co-operation in the field.

This fourth event, organized on the occasion of International Migrants Day, shall close the works of this topical series for 2021 and serve as wider platform to present issues discussed and ideas brought forward at a specific event for the 57 OSCE participating States and its Asian and Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation. It shall also help to collect their feedback and identify specific issues and themes to be addressed in similar future events.

### **Background**

In recent years, migrants and refugees have increasingly become targeted by intolerance, hate speech, harassment, and incitement to violence, off- and online. Rapid spread of hateful content is often exacerbated by technical possibilities provided by social media platforms. Such content may have dangerous effects in society by lowering the threshold of acceptance of racist and white supremacist theories and lead to condoning of real-life violence.

The impact of the increasing negative narrative surrounding migration and forced displacement, especially in those countries most affected by migrant and refugee arrivals, poses a risk for undermining social cohesion. Such dynamics, often boosted by hate speech, particularly through social media and the web, lead to detrimental effects on many aspects, including safety and well-being, a feeling of belonging, and the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants.

Both, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and revived protests at global level against racism and discrimination under the “Black Lives Matter” hashtag, have had a tremendous impact on communications and public information on vulnerable groups within societies such as refugees, migrants, and national minorities. While on the one hand, there has been an increase in hatred against those groups, on the other hand, there was also an outcry against xenophobic incidents of hate crimes, hate speech, as well as other forms of intolerance and calls for more inclusive societies. This situation is a cause of serious concern for the OSCE, UNHCR, and the UN more generally.

ODIHR’s regular monitoring of and reporting on hate crimes shows that bias motivated crimes continue to be a pervasive issue around the OSCE region. ODIHR’s annual hate crime reports document hate crimes and incidents targeting particular groups of people, documenting that racism, xenophobia, and intolerance continue to manifest in acts of violence against migrants, refugees and other minorities, as well as civil society organizations assisting those groups. The investigation and prosecution of hate crimes and incidents, and the need to counter organized hate groups who incite or use violence present particular challenges for OSCE participating States.

The Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media has an early warning function and provides rapid response to serious non-compliance with regard to free media and freedom of expression. The Representative has consistently recognized the impact of hate speech on particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups, and fights deliberate and violent hate speech in the media through awareness-raising projects, education, and regular meetings with media outlets, editors, and journalists. A number of issues have come to her attention in relation to harmful content and illegal hate speech, among them silencing and intimidation of underrepresented groups or censorship of legitimate content.

From UNHCR’s experience, discrimination is among the main root causes of forced displacement. Moreover, successful integration of displaced populations in host countries depends to a large extent on a welcoming culture within societies, on understanding for the plight of displaced populations, and avoidance of stigmatization and negative stereotypes in the media. Recognizing these challenges at global level, in 2020, UNHCR published a guide for UNHCR field staff on how to address and respond to situations of racism and xenophobia that affect refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees, and stateless persons.

## **Objective**

The informal exchanges throughout the year, undertaken in the exercise of the mandates of both organizations, tackled a broad range of external relation and public information activities of OSCE and UNHCR staff, as well as awareness-raising, and the promotion of inclusion and diversity by these organizations, in line with respective mandates.

This final event of the webinar series will close a cycle of discussion in 2021 surrounding the increasing challenges of intolerance, discrimination, as well as incidents of hate speech against

migrants and refugees in the OSCE area. It intends to present to the OSCE participating States the good practices and approaches identified, and to design a way forward to tackle these challenges. The feedback collected from OSCE participating States is hoped to shape future initiatives.

The event shall look at the need for refined and differentiated approaches, which acknowledge the complexity of and challenges deriving from migration and forced displacement, as well as gradual and multi-dimensional integration processes. It shall also address concerns and fears of host societies, while combating demagogic and false news, and promoting positive narratives.

States are invited to present their approaches in identifying and combating different forms of intolerance and discrimination, including hate speech and public disinformation campaigns off-and online, and to discuss practical ways to address them. At the event, different tools and good practices identified in the OSCE region to mitigate the increasing negative narratives surrounding migration and forced displacement will be presented.

Moreover, the event shall help to assess the potential for aligning key messages, possible synergies and, thereby, enhance co-operation between the OSCE and UNHCR at field and HQ level.

The event will be conducted in English with Russian simultaneous interpretation available.

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## **AGENDA**

### **10:00-10:10 Welcome**

- Ambassador Tobias Lorentzson, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Swedish Delegation to the OSCE

### **10:10-10:40 High-level opening (including Q&A)**

Moderator: Kateryna Ryabiko, ODIHR First Deputy Director

- Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media
- Luca Fratini, Director of the Office of the Secretary General
- Christoph Bierwirth, Head of UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN Agencies
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Regina Polak, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions

### **10:40-12:10 Panel on good practices and approaches identified in the OSCE area**

Moderators: Elena Cherniavska, RFoM Senior Adviser, and Sophie Hofbauer, UNHCR Senior Liaison Associate

**On social media:**

- Malte Blas, Communications Associate/Digital Engagement, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, on countering intolerance and discrimination on social media
- Voislav Stojanovski, National Rule of Law Officer, OSCE Mission to Skopje, on the project “*Support of national concerned parties in the fight against hate crimes and hate speech*” and the website “*Report Hate Crimes*”: Together with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the OSCE Mission to Skopje runs a website in English, Albanian, and Macedonian, where incidents of hate crimes can be reported and monitored in the country.

**On shaping positive public perceptions and attitudes towards migrants and refugees in host societies:**

- Milos Bogicevic, Head of Human Rights, OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, on developing responses based on public perceptions research based on “*Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Public Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences*” study
- Theodora Tsovilli, Senior Protection Associate, UNHCR Athens, on the Migratory Birds project
- Teresa Albano, Economic Affairs Officer, Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) on the E-MINDFUL project

**On Access to and use of media by refugees and migrants:**

- Ahmed Bazoon, Member of the UNHCR Refugee Advisory Board & Rumour Free Campaign, Bulgaria
- Nadia Bellardi, Project Manager, Community Media Forum Europe

*Followed by Questions and Answers and Statements by OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation*

**12:40-13:00 Debriefing, outcomes and key messages on co-operation and the way forward**

- Christoph Bierwirth, Head of UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN Agencies
- Alice Szczepanikova, Migration and Freedom of Movement Adviser, ODIHR
- Jürgen Heissel, Director, RFoM
- Luca Pianese, Senior Migration Security Expert, OSCE External Co-operation Section