

**UNHCR Contribution to
Panel 4 - The way forward: towards inclusive and comprehensive protection
22nd Conference of the OSCE Alliance against Trafficking in Persons
"Protection: upholding victims' rights and strengthening assistance"
6 April 2022**

Excellencies,

Delegates,

Colleagues,

I am grateful for UNHCR being given the opportunity to also contribute to this concluding panel of the conference and to share some thoughts on ways forward. I have the privilege to be able to build on the contribution made by our Deputy High Commissioner in her keynote speech on Monday. She reminded us on the complex linkages between development, poverty, conflicts and displacements and on the many acute conflicts challenging peace in today's world. Let me recall the thoughtful quote attributed to the UNSG by which our Deputy High Commissioner concluded her contribution: "For predators and human traffickers, war is not a tragedy. It is an opportunity. And women and children are the targets."¹ Indeed, armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, displacement and other forms of humanitarian crises tend to exacerbate exposure to risks, threats, abuse, and exploitation, including trafficking in persons. All of us, present today, in person or online, should be united in our efforts to reduce risks, to prevent women, men, girls and boys falling victim to trafficking and to offer assistance and protection where prevention efforts have failed.

Please allow me, building thereon, to share with you:

(i) some thoughts on principles which should, from a UNHCR perspective, govern our common efforts to prevent refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, internally displaced populations, migrants and others, including unaccompanied and separated children, falling victim to traffickers, and to enhance the protection of those at risk or having become victims already and

¹ [Secretary-General's opening remarks to the press on the war in Ukraine | United Nations Secretary-General](#)

(ii) some concrete considerations, ideas and suggestions on measure to be taken. While focusing on the context of the Ukraine situation and trying to identify some particularities, this is done in the understanding that other conflicts should not be forgotten.

Our efforts should be rights-based, thus respect the inherent dignity of victims and persons at risk of falling victim to trafficking as well as the principle of non-discrimination [Protection and assistance services have to be provided to all victims of trafficking without discrimination or prejudice on the basis of e.g nationality, gender (identity), age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, language, social status, or any other status.].

Efforts should be victim-focused, encourage and build on victim participation, respecting the individual's self-determination; in case of child victims, the "best interest of the child" should guide all efforts.

Co-operation among different governmental, international and civil society actors should be based on the understanding that only comprehensive, well-adjusted, multi-actor and multi-dimensional efforts, based on mutual respect for the different mandates and areas of expertise can lead to effective results, both as to prevention and response.

In case of any newly developing crisis, anti-trafficking action needs to be mainstreamed into the humanitarian response efforts from the very outset of the design and implementation of a humanitarian operation, and resources must be adjusted according to the dimension of the challenges faced.

While in context of the present Ukraine crisis the international community, including the OSCE and UNHCR can build on anti-trafficking mechanisms, which have been built during recent years, both regionally and in the country context, including comprehensive capacity building efforts and the establishment of referral mechanisms, this conference has shown remaining shortcomings and challenges.

Moreover, there are a few particularities to be observed and to be considered in response:

a) Dimension of the crisis and profile of displaced populations

With a total of more than 10 million persons displaced due to the war in Ukraine, including more than 4 million refugees and more than 6 million IDPs and considering that 90% of the displaced are women and children, the sheer size of displacement exceeds the available response capacities. Given the profile of the displaced, we face at the same time a displacement and a family separation crisis.

- The dimension of the challenge requires engagement of many actors, acknowledging different capacities, presences, experiences, and established partnerships on the

ground. There is need to work together and to make use of synergies. While from UN doctrine, efforts within Ukraine are managed under the cluster approach, led by our OCHA colleagues and the regional refugee response is managed by UNHCR following the sector approach, at country operation level there is a lot of flexibility.

- Joint efforts aimed at enhancing the response capacities within the authorities and NGOs are encouraged. Such efforts could build on existing OSCE engagement and cooperation with partners, including IOM, UNHCR and civil society partners as well as the joint UNICEF-UNHCR Blue Dot initiative, which is being expanded as we speak. UNHCR has significantly enhanced its presence in countries bordering Ukraine, including through the deployment of emergency teams and is now in the process of establishing enhanced longer-term presences according to needs. My Office is ready to facilitate contacts for future training cooperation at country level.

b) Consequences of travel privileges and freedom of movement

The visa free regime applied to Ukrainian citizens holding biometric passports has largely avoided any issues related to access to territory and protection as has the activation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive. This has, however, complicated early registration and understanding of secondary movements. Presently, many of the displaced still prefer staying close to Ukraine, hoping to return soon and thus being reluctant to accept resettlement offers at this stage. This may change should the conflict become protracted. Asylum authorities, which traditionally had been capacitated and sensitized by UNHCR to identify victims of trafficking and persons potentially at risk with a view to make cross referrals to trafficking-related response mechanisms, are rarely contacted (at least at this initial phase), thus have a limited potential in awareness raising and identification of victims. Border guards, while remaining a key actor, often were overwhelmed by the sheer number of arrivals.

While the welcoming approach vis-à-vis refugees from Ukraine in first- and second-line countries, both by authorities and civil society is much appreciated and has enhanced understanding and respect for the institution of asylum, decentralized accommodation and support options bear risks of their own (as compared to accommodation in reception facilities), which need to be addressed.

- Efforts are required to comprehensively map (potential) first points of contact for persons displaced from Ukraine (including e.g. municipal registration centers, assistance distribution points, service centers) in order to identify an adjusted target audience for future training and other capacity building efforts with a view that awareness raising, identification of victim and response efforts can be done as soon as possible after arrival.

- Establishment of initial reception facilities allowing such screening for vulnerabilities and protection sensitive onward processing are encouraged, though such should be done without hampering the swift onward movement of those who have accommodation options with family members or friends available elsewhere in Europe.
- Efforts to look into the establishment of vetting mechanisms (e.g. for housing offered through online booking platforms) and quick response options for persons accommodated in decentralized manner require attention, resources and insight from NGOs operating on the ground.

c) Need for enhanced systematic regional information exchange and co-operation

The mobility of the displaced and the high likelihood of onward movements in the coming months, should the conflict not come to an end, will require more and more systematic transboundary cooperation, with a view to better monitor developments and to prevent that persons at risk “disappear” from our radar. In this context, UNHCR is committed to closely cooperating with partners, including the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator.

- UNHCR is considering the establishment of a regional task team allowing for information and experience exchange, identification of trends and harmonization of approaches to which partners operational on the ground would be welcome. More details will be shared soon. Moreover, the support of broader partner and umbrella organizations will be needed in awareness raising and consolidated advocacy efforts. UNHCR will remain committed to a transparent and inclusive approach.

I hope these initial thoughts are of help and will inform and trigger some further debate.