

Statement of H.E. Ambassador and Permanent Representative

Vesna Batistić Kos

for ExCom UNHCR, from 7th to 11th October 2019, Geneva, Switzerland

Thank you Mr. Chair,

- Croatia aligns itself with the EU statement. Croatia thanks Mr. High Commissioner for the awakening report and panel, which addressed issue of statelessness – a status, or rather its absence, which extensively limits the lives of people, from basic rights to healthcare, education, social rights to legal protection, thus putting those people in vulnerable position subject to all different kinds of discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Croatia would like to, once again, express high appreciation to HC and his staff, as well as other partner organisations, who have worked tirelessly, despite the obstacles along the way, and contributed to assigning statelessness a visible place high on both public and political agenda.
- Against this backdrop, I am proud to use this opportunity to underline the efforts that Croatia invests in fighting statelessness on its own ground. Croatia is a signatory of the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Furthermore, our national Law on Citizenship prevents people to become stateless due to dissolution of the former SFRY and the establishment of the new independent states.
- Consequently, the number of stateless persons in Croatia is rather small. It mainly relates to persons belonging to Roma minority who are mostly not *de iure* stateless but rather persons of unknown nationality/citizenship due to either their own failure to regulate their status within their home country after the dissolution of the former SFRY or due to certain administrative barriers.
- In order to achieve further progress in this agenda, in 2011, Croatia adopted Zagreb Declaration, whose foundations are built on the principles of respecting human rights and international instruments on statelessness, focusing especially on the Roma issue.
- Both the National Programme and later adopted National Strategy for the Roma integration (2013 to 2020) were developed to raise awareness in order to regulate their status.
- Furthermore, with the aim to ease the administrative barriers, Croatian Ministry of Interior has been organizing continuous training for government officials dealing with status of stateless persons, and has and will continue to apply whole of state approach

cooperating with the relevant international organizations and civil society organizations in assisting stateless people. The Ministry continuously seeks to identify persons without nationality who have been legally living in Croatia and will also continue to implement measures set out in the UNHCR's Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014 – 2024. So far Croatia's efforts have brought some tangible results and we stand ready to share our experiences with other interested countries.

International protection system

Mr Chair,

- The current situation and trends of global forced displacement reaching the unprecedented number of 70,8 mil displaced persons and growing is a terrifying reminder that the international cooperation is indispensable. Therefore, we would like to commend UNHCR and partners for their dedicated work on the implementation of Global compact for refugees and its comprehensive efforts in organisation of Global Refugee Forum. Comprehensive and inclusive approach to humanitarian and development aid is enshrined in our National Strategy for Development Aid, as well as in our protection system.
- In line with the EU voluntary resettlement programme, Croatia has recently welcomed the last group arriving following our voluntary commitment to host 250 refugees and asylum seekers from Syria. Furthermore, the Government recently adopted the Decision signing up to accept another 150 refugees and asylum seekers from third countries, including persons who are stateless. The protection system in Croatia is regulated by the Law on International and Temporary Protection covering both asylum and subsidiary protection. The Ministry of Interior Affairs, as a designated responsible government body, cooperates with international organisations and NGOs, trying to provide adequate standard of living for the ones who enjoy protection within our country.
- Mr Chair, allow me to reiterate that persons under the international protection system in Croatia are entitled to comprehensive and inclusive approach that adorns the CRRF and GCR, enjoy health protection, access to labour market (nine months after submitting application for the protection, provided he/she has not done anything that would impede his/her employment), children are entitled to primary and secondary education having the same privileges as the Croatian children. As a country that pays special attention to the inclusion of ethnical and religious minorities, e.g. the Islamic community of Croatia plays an active role in the integration process for those coming from Muslim countries. Our approach has brought some successful stories of integration in the education system, on labour market and overall in the Croatian society.

Thank you for your attention.