

SERBIA

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Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen, dear Colleagues,

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, to the co-hosts and co-conveners of this extremely important and timely meeting on one of the most up-to-date topics of the present time.

The figures of 25 million refugees and 41 million internally displaced persons worldwide are very worrying. Addressing this complex problem is a test of our responsibility and commitment to values such as human rights and solidarity. I take this opportunity to reaffirm this time again our willingness to further co-operate and coordinate activities aimed at the good-quality implementation of what was agreed within Global Compact on Refugees. In this regard, I would like to point out that since the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees in the Republic of Serbia, we have endorsed several contributions to:

- introduce an individualized approach in the process of refugee integration and evidence based funding
- integrate refugee and asylum-seeking children into the national compulsory education system,
- ensure active involvement of local communities in the integration process of refugees,
- establish an early warning and preparedness mechanism in case of emergency or massive influx of refugees,
- establish regular assessment of challenges facing the refugee integration process in the field of housing and employment

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Republic of Serbia expresses its support for the efforts of the international community to address forced displacement as a global humanitarian problem. In this context, I would like to point out our contribution to helping all refugees and displaced persons in our territory, including refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, as well as refugees and asylum seekers from the last migrant wave in 2015-16. The Republic of Serbia has responded to the challenge of the global migration crisis in a humane and responsible manner and in accordance with international standards, relying on its own resources, as well as on cooperation with UN bodies and agencies and other international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Although very few people have applied for asylum, given that Western European countries are their final destination of hope, more than 1.5 million transited through the country. Serbia has made every effort to provide assistance to all migrants in transit, especially to migrant children and other vulnerable categories.

In order to continue fulfilling its obligations in accordance with the highest standards, Republic of Serbia, together with neighboring countries, will have to solve financing problem in sustainable manner through access to existing funds. This will be practical application of burden sharing principal. Needs should be the main criteria for accessing the funds, instead of formal status of the country.

Dear Colleagues,

Since this event is also envisaged as a forum to share experiences and good practices, I would like to draw your attention to a project being implemented in the Republic of Serbia, in partnership with UNHCR. Namely, the Regional Housing Programme jointly carried out by four countries – Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, alongside the European Commission, UNHCR, OSCE and the Council of Europe Development Bank, the implementation of which has been in full scale.

The Regional Housing Programme has demonstrated in practice that if there is a will, there is a way to find a solution. This is a very important message, especially having in mind that in addition to the refugees from the former SFRY, some 200 000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija reside in Serbia, since even 20 years after the conflict there are no conditions for their sustainable return. The rights to return, to free use of property, non-discrimination and unimpeded access to political, economic and social rights in Kosovo and Metohija have been enjoyed by a negligible number of persons. The right to permanent resettlement either by returning to their place of origin, integration in their place of resettlement or through their relocation elsewhere where there are conditions for the exercise of their guaranteed human rights, must be ensured for tens of thousands of IDPs who are not able to do this on their own without additional support. The experiences, and particularly models and tools developed for refugees in the RHP framework to tackle protracted refugee situations could, under certain conditions, be applicable to internal displacement cases.

If we take note of the realities arising from the economic and other circumstances in the region, it is clear that, despite the commitment shown by some stakeholders, short of assistance of the international community no solution to the problems of protracted displacement can be found in the near future. It is our expectation that we have to make further efforts to resolve the situation with regard to protracted displacement in the region, building also on the lessons learned and applying the good practices established in the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to conclude by thanking High Commissioner Grandi and UNHCR for their devotion and indefatigable efforts to deal with the ongoing global migrant and refugee crisis, but also for their commitment and perseverance in addressing the issue of long-term displacement. UNHCR and other international partners can, in the future as well, count on Serbia and its cooperation towards the accomplishment of this goal.

Thank you.