



European Union

UNHCR Executive Committee 70th Session 7–11 October 2019

Agenda item 3: High-level segment on statelessness and general debate

Statement by the European Union

Thank you Madam Chair,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.
2. The Candidate Countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia* and Albania*, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.
3. Once again, Mr High Commissioner, you have given us a sobering account of the current situation and trends of global forced displacement, which continues to increase, estimated to be over 70¹ million people. We must not forget that behind this number are individuals whose life, hopes and dreams have been shattered or placed on hold with often an uncertain future. We thank you, High Commissioner, your staff and your partner organizations around the world, for your tireless efforts to provide help and new hope to these people and for putting a human face on the phenomena of global forced displacement by sharing their stories.
4. The world we live in is ever more complex and inter-connected. Conflicts, violence and oppression have immediate consequences beyond borders, as news, information and people travel faster than ever before. Climate change and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of forced displacement. It is a phenomenon with a global impact that requires global solutions, yet it is developing countries that continue to bear the brunt of forced displacement. The EU and its Member States recognize that we all have a role to play and remain committed to contributing to better global burden- and responsibility sharing for the world's refugees.

¹ According to UNHCR's Global Trends Report, released on 19 June, nearly 70,8 million people were displaced at the end of 2018.

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

5. The President-elect of the new European Commission, Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, has identified climate change, demographic changes and migration among key challenges and priorities in the Political Guidelines for the new Commission, with a clear ambition to strive for more in our efforts to contribute to build peaceful and prosperous societies in the European Union as well as beyond our borders. Within the EU, this vision includes a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, including the reform of asylum rules, to find a new way forward to ease concerns and overcome internal differences, as well as a reinforced European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Europe will always honour our values and extend a helping hand to persons fleeing persecution or conflict – that is our moral duty. We will do so by continuing to host refugees and offer voluntary resettlement opportunities and complementary pathways for refugees to Europe. We will need a fresh start on burden sharing, to help EU Member States facing the most pressure, as well as more sustainable approach to search and rescue in saving lives at sea. A more effective approach to return those not eligible for international protection, necessary to safeguard the institute of asylum, also form part of the comprehensive vision on migration and asylum of the new European Commission.

6. However, the engagement of the European Union and its Member States go beyond our own borders, starting in the home countries of the people who decide to leave and embark on often dangerous journeys, and continuing in host countries and countries of transit. Addressing the root causes of forced displacement remains a major priority. The EU will continue to play a full and active role in global conflict resolution, bringing together political, humanitarian and development instruments in an integrated and comprehensive approach.

7. A stronger cooperation and deepening partnership with our neighbours and third countries, particularly in Africa, is a clear focus of the new European Commission. As the world's biggest donor of development assistance, the EU and its Member States will continue to seek to improve the perspectives and opportunities of young women and men in their home countries, investing in their health, in their education and skills, in infrastructure and job opportunities and in their security – very much in line with the identified priorities for the Global Refugee Forum to be held here in December.

8. The EU and its Member States look forward to this first Global Refugee Forum, as an important opportunity to take stock of progress made and share good practices and experiences of comprehensive refugee responses so far, as well as to demonstrate tangible support to ease the burden of refugee hosting countries and mobilize broader global support for burden- and responsibility sharing for refugees. We commend Germany and the other co-convenors of the Forum – Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Turkey – for their leadership and engagement. Some EU Member States have already announced co-sponsorship commitments or pledges and others are still exploring how to contribute and share our different experiences. As for the European Union, I am pleased to formally announce that we will be a co-sponsor in four of the six focus

areas; namely burden- and responsibility sharing, education, jobs and livelihood and solutions, building on the EU policy on forced displacement and development and our significant support to comprehensive and inclusive refugee responses over the past years.

9. There are indeed many positive examples of inclusive and comprehensive responses to refugee situations to guide us and build upon. The application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework has already generated positive, concrete results. We are heartened by the many examples of inclusive laws, policies and practices that are paving the way for better socio-economic inclusion of refugees, including access to documentation, health services, education and the labour market – which in the long run will lead to better outcomes for both refugees and their host communities, while also making refugees better prepared for possible return and reintegration in their home countries. The EU and its Member States commend the countries applying the CRRF for their leadership and generosity and reassure you that we will continue to stand by your side.

Mr Chair,

11. Turning now to the topic of our high-level segment, statelessness is a challenge that rarely reaches the front news, in media as well as in the work of this Executive Committee. Yet it affects millions of people across the globe, limiting their access to rights and services and participation in political and social life. The good news is that statelessness can be addressed, prevented and even eradicated – as set out in the UNHCR #IBelong campaign to end statelessness by 2024. Half way through this 10-year campaign, we already see some tangible results. Over the last five years, several EU Member States have ratified the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. A majority of EU Member States have now ratified the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness.

12. In 2015 the EU adopted Council Conclusions on Statelessness that enabled the European Migration Network to launch a Platform on Statelessness to facilitate exchange of information and good practices among EU Member States and contribute to better knowledge and visibility on statelessness issues in Europe. In 2017 the Platform, in collaboration with UNHCR and European Network on Statelessness, organised a high-level conference on addressing statelessness in the European Union. The Platform will continue to provide technical support to EU Member States and, in cooperation with EU institutions, UNHCR, UNICEF and civil society, address gaps and raise awareness on statelessness.

13. Outside Europe, the EU and its Member States support efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness through various tools and instruments. Our humanitarian and development assistance provide support to registration, including birth registration, and access to civil documentation, all key measures to prevent statelessness, for instance as in the context of the Syrian conflict. A fundamental principle for EU's humanitarian assistance is that it is provided to

persons in vulnerable situations based on needs and irrespective of their status, which includes stateless persons, such as Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Mr Chair,

14. Internally displaced is another group of persons that are often forgotten or left behind. Only last year, another 28 million people became internally displaced, due to conflicts or disasters. Internally displaced persons can sometimes be more vulnerable than refugees, due to security risks and lack of humanitarian access in areas affected by conflict or instability. The EU and its Member States believe that it is important to increase international attention and engagement on internal displacement, and have therefore called on the UN Secretary-General, together with 29 other States, to establish a High-level Panel on IDPs. We hope that this panel, bringing together a diverse group of experts from different backgrounds and regions, will mobilize global attention and provide concrete recommendations on how the international community can better support states to prevent, address and find solutions to internal displacement globally. Properly addressing internal displacement requires a strong collaborative effort by the mandated agencies, with a clear distribution of tasks in line with their respective mandates. UNHCR has an important role to play in the broader humanitarian system, yet its engagement with IDPs has not been as consistent and predictable as its support for refugees. We hope that the new policy on UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement will lead to a more robust and predictable approach by UNHCR to IDP situations going forward.

Mr Chair,

15. In order to adjust to changing global challenges and capture new opportunities, UNHCR must continue to be vigilant in keeping its own house in good shape. The EU and its Member States therefore welcome the internal reform initiative by the High Commissioner, including the ongoing decentralization of the regional bureaux. We believe these changes are both necessary and timely in order to adapt to the new way of working under the new relevant international instruments on refugees, taken into account that not all EU Member States have signed up to the Global Compact on Refugees, as well as align with broader UN reform. We support the aim to move decision-making and support functions closer to the field, while at the same time clarifying roles and responsibilities, based on the three lines of defence, in order to strengthen oversight and accountability throughout the organization. We encourage UNHCR to continue to increase effectiveness, invest in new partnerships and strengthen cooperation with other UN agencies and contribute to collective humanitarian outcomes, based on respective core strengths, in order to ensure that maximum aid goes to those in need, as committed to in the World Humanitarian and the Summit Grand Bargain.

Thank you.