

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madam Chair, Distinguished Delegates

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on key developments in Europe.

Two years into this devastating war, the Ukrainian people continue to face severe hardship. Millions are displaced, their homes destroyed, and their futures uncertain. Humanitarian conditions inside Ukraine remain dire with some 40 per cent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. Needs in eastern regions, principally those straddling the frontline, are particularly critical, underlining the importance of humanitarian access to all those in need of assistance.

UNHCR, alongside sister agencies and partners, continues to support government-led efforts to deliver life-saving aid and protection services. Millions of internally displaced and war-affected people have received support through multi-purpose cash, protection interventions, shelter repairs and core relief items. The financial support of the international community to the response remains paramount - these resources are a lifeline for millions of Ukrainians struggling to survive. As we look to prospects for return and recovery in some areas of Ukraine, UNHCR will continue its support to the Government's national recovery plan in coordination with nexus partners.

Beyond Ukraine's borders, nearly 6 million refugees remain displaced across Europe. The decision of the European Union to extend the Temporary Protection Directive until March 2025, and of other countries to extend similar national temporary protection arrangements, represents a reaffirmation of their commitment to refugee protection. Today, Europe is also witnessing the tangible contributions that refugees can make, if effectively included, to their host societies. A UNHCR commissioned study on the impact of refugees from Ukraine on the economy in Poland found that, in 2023, refugees contributed between 0.7 and 1.1 per cent to Poland's Gross Domestic Product.

As we look towards March 2025, and the expiration of temporary protection in the EU, it is important to maintain a coordinated, predictable, and harmonized approach among States. UNHCR welcomes recent discussions at the Justice and Home Affairs Council which emphasized the need for a common, coordinated and comprehensive approach and stands ready to work with all states to develop viable protection arrangements, that safeguard rights, uphold legal obligations, and support the well-

documented trends in pendular movements—which ensure continued ties to Ukraine and will help facilitate eventual voluntary return.

The war in Ukraine has had an exacting toll on children who comprise nearly 40% of the refugee population. Recent surveys paint a concerning picture: nearly 50% of households with school-aged children report at least one child not being enrolled in national education. This translates to hundreds of thousands of children outside of formal education with potentially devastating consequences for their academic performance and life aspirations. We must prioritize getting these children back into quality learning environments. The plight of unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine also remains of significant concern. UNHCR is steadfast in its commitment to work with all actors for the safety and well-being of these vulnerable children guided by their best interests.

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The situation at Europe's external borders remains deeply concerning - violent push backs continue, while increasing numbers of people continue to tragically lose their lives at sea. Elsewhere in Europe, an increasing number of states seek to externalize asylum obligations, a practice that UNHCR strongly opposes.

The growth in asylum applications across the EU in recent months has increased pressure on national asylum processing and reception capacities, however, stricter border controls alone will not solve this complex issue. Alternatives to dangerous journeys for people on the move are urgently needed, including mutually beneficial labor mobility and other complementary pathways. Alongside this, renewed commitment by states to share responsibility with countries along key mixed movement routes, supported by efforts to address the root causes of displacement, is critical. Greater investment in humanitarian assistance, asylum capacity and development aid to support basic services for refugees, migrants and host communities is essential. This route-based approach requires sustained political will and targeted, coordinated investments by European states to expand access to protection and solutions in countries of origin, asylum, transit, and destination.

Last December's high-level political agreement on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum offers hope for greater solidarity with European states receiving the highest number of arrivals and has the potential to deliver better outcomes for the displaced, host countries, and EU member states alike. UNHCR stands ready to lend support to European Union institutions and member states in its protection-sensitive implementation following its adoption.

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The second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 served as a powerful demonstration of solidarity. Collectively, European stakeholders made around 600 pledges in support for refugees both within and outside of Europe. We look forward to working with all of you to transform these commitments into concrete action.

Thank you.

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