

75th SESSION OF THE UNHCR EXCOM
Item 3: GENERAL DEBATE
Statement by the REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
delivered by Svetlana Velimirović, Deputy Commissioner
Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia
Geneva, 14 October 2024

Mr. High Commissioner
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We thank the High Commissioner for his report and we express appreciation to UNHCR staff for their dedicated engagement and work in the field.

As one of the countries on the Western Balkan Route, the Republic of Serbia has been facing mixed migration flows for more than a decade, permanently providing shelter and support to all in vulnerable position.

The Republic of Serbia is committed to create conditions for permanent and sustainable solutions for all displaced persons. I would like to remind you of the successfully implemented Regional Housing Programme. Unfortunately, eight thousand families that fled from the former Yugoslavia, who acquired Serbian citizenship, are still in need of a permanent housing solution. Despite significant efforts that Serbian Government invests in housing programmes, additional time and support is needed to finally close the refugee issue in the region.

The Republic of Serbia develops its system of international protection and ensures access to asylum to all those who seek protection from persecution. Inclusion and integration of asylum seekers into our society is conducted in close cooperation with UNHCR.

Since the outbreak of the refugee crisis in Ukraine, the Republic of Serbia has been actively involved in providing adequate protection and assistance to Ukrainian citizens.

At the Second Global Forum for Refugees, we announced new pledges and in doing so, reaffirmed our readiness to contribute to solution to the problem of increasing number of refugees in the world.

Madam Chair,

Allow me to bring to the attention of this Committee an unacceptable situation in our Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija that is a result of violation of human rights by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština. The Position of Serbs and non-Albanian population is further deteriorating within the Province, consequently affecting the internally displaced persons in other parts of the country as well.

Currently, there are 196,140 IDPs registered in Serbia and more than 17.000 internally displaced Serbs and non-Albanians within the Province.

However, the severe security situation in Kosovo and Metohija and the existential threat to Serbs and other non-Albanians due to the violent and hostile activities of the Provisional Institutions in Priština, make return impossible. Only in the first nine months this year, there were 87 ethnically motivated attacks against Serbs, especially returnees, in most cases without any legal proceedings against perpetrators.

The return of Serbs and other non-Albanian population to Kosovo and Metohija is one of the most unsuccessful in history due to constant security pressure on returnees, breach of their fundamental rights, and personal and economic freedoms. Despite decades of international military and civilian presence, adequate security and legal conditions for return have not been ensured. In the past twenty years, only 1.9% of IDPs have made a sustainable return to Kosovo and Metohija.

Unfortunately, I have to report that return is blocked and internally displaced persons in the Republic of Serbia are not able to exercise their basic right to freely choose between local integration and sustainable return and therefore, durable solutions cannot be reached.

It is essential that international community enables implementation of the signed agreements within the EU-facilitated dialogue, and thus ensure conditions for sustainable return including the establishment of the Community of Serbian Municipalities. I would like to remind you that this obligation from the Brussels agreement is still pending for more than 11 years.

Thank you.