

Update on the operations of UNHCR in Europe

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

The situation in Ukraine dramatically impacted the political context in much of Europe, prompting one of the largest refugee movements in recent history. Within months, more than 7 million Ukrainians crossed international borders seeking protection, while millions were displaced within Ukraine or adversely impacted by conflict. At the same time, the arrival of asylum-seekers to Europe from elsewhere in the world increased, as movement restrictions put in place to contain the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic were eased.

While the numbers of arrivals to Europe from other parts of the world remain manageable, new trends and routes have emerged – with increases along some routes and corresponding decreases recorded on others. Between January and August 2022, the number of new arrivals along the Mediterranean and northwest African maritime routes increased by 18 per cent (79,800), compared to the same period in 2021 (67,700). A notable increase was also recorded in Italy, where arrivals were 28 per cent higher than the previous year (some 50,500 as of the end of August, compared to approximately 39,400 in the same period last year). Of these, 55 per cent had departed from Libya, followed by Tunisia and Türkiye.

Arrivals to Spain, via the western Mediterranean and northwest African maritime routes, decreased by 9 per cent in the first eight months of 2022 (18,700 compared with 20,600 during the same period in 2021). New arrivals to Greece via the eastern Mediterranean route increased by 40 per cent in 2022, reaching 7,900 compared to 5,700 during the first eight months of 2021. Likewise, arrivals to Cyprus, via the eastern Mediterranean, increased by 57 per cent (some 2,400 persons) compared to the prior year.

Reports of expulsions and often violent pushbacks of refugees and asylum-seekers along all major arrival routes into Europe have continued and remain a serious concern. While recognizing the sovereign right of all States to manage their borders, UNHCR continues to call for credible inquiries into alleged violations of international law and for international human rights obligations to be upheld. Likewise, developments in some countries seeking to externalize core asylum and protection obligations through the conclusion of bilateral treaties or the adoption of domestic legislation are worrying.

Ukraine situation

The armed conflict in Ukraine erupted on 24 February 2022. This followed eight years of conflict in eastern Ukraine, which left millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance. The ongoing armed conflict has triggered one of the fastest growing displacement and humanitarian crises on record, with nearly one third of Ukrainians forced from their homes. As of the end of August 2022, over 6.9 million people were internally displaced within Ukraine, and 7 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe, while over 4 million refugees from Ukraine had registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe.

An estimated 17.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Ukraine, and over 13,700 civilian casualties have been recorded since the start of the conflict, including some over 5,600 who were killed. The delivery of life-saving aid remains challenging, due to the lack of safe and predictable humanitarian access in areas with ongoing fighting.

In March 2022, the European Union triggered the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time since its adoption in 2001. UNHCR welcomed this decision as an optimal way to provide immediate protection and socioeconomic inclusion for refugees, including access to accommodation, to the labour market, and to social and health care services. Furthermore, a solidarity platform was established by the European Union to monitor and support implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive and to coordinate the operational response.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2022 plan for the Europe region – by impact area

Ensuring an effective operational response

In response to developments in Ukraine, and in support of the extraordinary response by States hosting refugees from Ukraine, UNHCR rapidly scaled up its operations, supporting and working closely with concerned governments, municipalities and local partners who are leading the response. Activities centred on core protection advocacy and outreach, assistance to the most vulnerable, and efforts to facilitate access to services and labour markets and to ensure inclusion in national social protection systems. Working with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 34 Blue Dots¹ were established across Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia, providing family and child-focused services, advice, information and referrals. To date, some 150,000 people have benefited from Blue Dot services. Furthermore, UNHCR quickly established multipurpose cash assistance programmes to provide new arrivals with a crucial bridge to national social safety nets, reaching nearly 400,000 people in Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia by the beginning of September.

Within Ukraine, UNHCR continues to participate in the inter-agency response, under the leadership of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator and in support of the Government of Ukraine, to address the internal displacement situation. UNHCR focused its response on shelter repairs, cash assistance and the distribution of core relief items. With winter approaching, winterization and preparedness plans are being developed with government counterparts. Targeted cash and material assistance is also being provided to help extremely vulnerable households survive the harsh winter, characterized by scarcity and high prices. UNHCR expanded its field presence throughout the country in order to ensure the provision of humanitarian aid and protection for those in need. Furthermore, to facilitate the ongoing humanitarian response, a network of 24 UNHCR warehouses across the region, including logistics hubs in Hungary, Poland and Romania, have been established.

Beyond the response to the Ukraine situation, the regional housing programme implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia has been extended until June 2023, in order to take into account implementation delays related to COVID-19. By the end of July 2022, over 9,000 families had been assisted, out of the 11,400 planned. In 2022, UNHCR will continue to monitor the selection of the most vulnerable beneficiaries and will advocate with relevant countries to ensure the sustainability of solutions provided.

The escalation of tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan along the line of contact have been reported since early August 2022. In preparation for possible new displacement, UNHCR has undertaken a risk assessment and provided emergency preparedness training for local partners, while revising its preparedness and contingency plans. UNHCR remains committed to discharging its role over returns, as stipulated under paragraph 7 of the trilateral statement, once mutually acceptable modalities for access are identified by all parties.

Following the transfer to the Government of Greece of the cash and accommodation programme in late 2021, the operational footprint of UNHCR has been significantly reduced. The Office has refocused its programme on core protection activities, including efforts to ensure access to territory and asylum procedures, and to support the integration of recognized refugees.

¹ Jointly established by UNICEF and UNHCR, together with local authorities and partners, Blue Dots are safe spaces that provide displaced children and families with critical information, practical support and services.

Safeguarding asylum space and building effective protection systems, including in the context of mixed movements (impact area 1: Protection – changes in the enjoyment of rights as a result of increasingly favourable protection conditions)

With continued arrivals to Europe, supporting governments in ensuring access to territory, implementing fair and efficient asylum procedures, and providing safe and dignified reception remain priorities. The current situation at many of the European Union’s external borders, with continued pushbacks and denial of access to territory and asylum procedures, underscores the urgency of adjustments and policy reforms. With respect to the instrumentalization of refugees and migrants by States to achieve political ends, UNHCR continues to appeal to all States to extend meaningful protection to all those in need. Workable solutions are possible, as has been highlighted by the solidarity that States across Europe have offered to refugees from Ukraine. UNHCR will continue to engage with governments and other stakeholders in Europe to promote protection-sensitive border management, building on innovative good practices in registration, reception and differentiated procedures documented throughout the pandemic and in response to the large-scale influx from Ukraine in several countries.

The revised version of the “Strategy for UNHCR engagement in mixed movement in the Western Balkans” was issued in October 2021. In line with the multi-stakeholder approach of the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR seeks to harness support, complementarity and joint action from a variety of actors to implement the strategy. UNHCR remained engaged in capacity development, in particular with the roll-out of the Quality Assurance Initiative throughout the South-East Europe. This initiative aims to use quality assessment data as a basis to identify the gaps and areas where national asylum systems need reinforcement or adjustment.

Reforming the Common European Asylum System and strengthening the collective European response (impact area 1: Protection – changes in the enjoyment of rights as a result of increasingly favourable protection conditions)

Discussions and advocacy continue in support of the European Commission’s proposed Pact on Asylum and Migration, which UNHCR welcomed when it was tabled in 2020 as a step in the right direction in preserving asylum space within the European Union and fostering greater solidarity and responsibility-sharing among Member States. Progress has been made over the last year, including agreement among Member States in the Council of the European Union for a common position on two regulations (screening and the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database) that apply to the external borders, and which also provide for the establishment of independent national monitoring mechanisms. This was complemented by a declaration of solidarity agreed to by many Member States and associated States. Furthermore, the regulation establishing the European Union Agency for Asylum was adopted and is currently in force. UNHCR continues to engage with the presidency of the Council of the European Union, issuing recommendations to the French and Czech Republic presidencies of the Council of the European Union in January 2022, as well as with the European Parliament and the European Commission on key aspects of the Pact.

Inadequate reception systems in several European Union Member States remain of critical concern. Overcrowded facilities, security issues and insufficient access to services are contributing to heightened protection risks, including gender-based violence, particularly for unaccompanied and separated children, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, and victims of trafficking. UNHCR welcomed commitments by a number of States, including Austria, Italy, Lithuania and Serbia, to address identified challenges in reception centres, including in relation to unaccompanied children. In 2022, gender-based violence safety assessments in reception facilities in Europe will be rolled out to further mitigate the associated risks for asylum-seekers and refugees upon arrival, building on the 2021 pilot assessment.

Strengthening participatory and community-based approaches (impact area 3: Empowerment – changes as a result of advancements in community mechanisms, gender equality and livelihoods)

The Refugee Exchange, Advocacy and Leadership project was launched in June 2022 to build the capacity of refugee leaders and refugee-led organizations across Europe, and to provide a platform for exchange and learning. Online skills labs have taken place to build the potential of community leaders to be influential, have a greater understanding of fundraising, project and grants management, and to undertake refugee advocacy at the local, national and

regional levels.

UNHCR offices across Europe continued to advance community-based approaches and refugee participation, including through grant agreements to refugee-led organizations for community-run projects, such as community mobilization against female genital mutilation in Malta, social integration and information sessions for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex refugees in France, and language training in Georgia. In Greece, UNHCR organized monthly information sessions with 13 refugee-led organizations in Athens, as well as capacity-building for 75 community mobilizers in six municipalities in northern Greece. In Lithuania, UNHCR conducted trainings and consultations with refugee communities through the Lithuanian Refugee Council. The first Refugee Advisory Board in Ireland was established in February 2022, building on similar representative bodies in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Georgia, Switzerland and Türkiye.

A toolkit in support of the effective inclusion of refugees in the design of assistance programmes at the local level was developed, in collaboration with the Migration Policy Group, municipal authorities and civil society organizations in seven countries in Europe. It has been subsequently translated into 12 languages, and is facilitating renewed outreach and collaboration with municipalities across Europe.

The 34 Blue Dots in States neighbouring Ukraine have served to help with the identification and referral of persons with specific needs. In addition, 1.7 million people were reached through the Stay Safe Campaign with key messages on protection during flight and onward movement. All countries neighbouring Ukraine established UNHCR HELP pages (<https://help.unhcr.org>), which received more than 2.5 million visits. Telegram and WhatsApp chatbots were established in Hungary and Ukraine.

In response to the large influx of school-age children, the European Commission, in collaboration with UNHCR and UNICEF, developed guidance on the inclusion of Ukrainian children in national school systems in European Union host countries. Digital training tools for teachers of displaced learners were also developed.

Building on the renewed interest of local private sector actors in employing refugees, pilot projects are being launched in several countries to promote access to work and to link potential local employers with refugee talent through online platforms. The platforms will seek to engage all refugees (from Ukraine and elsewhere) and include opportunities for skilled and unskilled labour. In the Czech Republic, the Government, the private sector, civil society and UNHCR are working together in support of improved accommodation options for refugees from Ukraine. This initiative also supports the sharing of responsibilities between national and municipal authorities.

Securing solutions for refugees (and internally displaced persons – if applicable) (impact area 4: Solutions – changes in the enjoyment of durable and alternative pathways to solutions)

Resettlement and complementary pathways received sustained attention in 2022. As of December 2021, some 38,700 resettlement submissions were made to European countries under the 2020-2021 European Union resettlement programme cycle, with over 32,000 departures achieved. UNHCR recommended that the 27 European Union Member States maintain ambitious resettlement targets and resettle at least 40,000 refugees in 2023, including a minimum of 8,500 places for Afghan refugees, to keep pace with the five-year target of 42,500 resettlement departures. Work to further develop complementary pathways in Europe will continue, building on efforts by European Union institutions, civil society, foundations and the private sector to welcome new refugee talent.

Nearly 1,200 unaccompanied children were relocated from reception centres in Greece to Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland by the end of December 2021, just short of the total pledge of 1,587 places made by 16 countries. Furthermore, some 3,500 vulnerable asylum-seekers and international protection holders were relocated to Belgium, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal, exceeding the 3,288 pledged places. UNHCR has been coordinating their relocation with the Government of Greece, the European Union Agency for Asylum, the International Organization for Migration and UNICEF. Preventing and resolving situations of statelessness (impact areas 1 and 4: Protection and solutions)

Together with civil society and regional organizations, increased efforts were made to prevent and reduce statelessness in Europe within the framework of UNHCR's #IBelong campaign and against pledges made at the high-level segment on statelessness, which took place during the seventieth session of the Executive Committee and the Global Refugee Forum in 2019.

In Georgia, the Government and UNHCR launched a countrywide “door-to-door” campaign to raise awareness of statelessness determination procedures. Significant progress was made on the prevention of childhood statelessness, including in the Netherlands where the adoption of legal amendments to the Dutch Nationality Act provided access to nationality for undocumented stateless children after five years of residence.

UNHCR welcomed the establishment of the *Unione Italiana Apolidi* (Italian stateless union), the first stateless-led organization in Italy. It also contributed to the organization of the first course on statelessness in the Russian language organized by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo. This initiative benefited government experts on statelessness and other key actors from nine countries.

Strengthening external engagement and advocacy, and mobilizing support (impact areas 1 and 4: protection and solutions)

In response to the Ukraine situation, UNHCR facilitated the establishment of coordination structures, in line with the refugee coordination model, to support the overall coordination of the humanitarian response. Inter-agency Refugee Coordination Forums, led by UNHCR and the members of specific sectoral groups, have been established in neighbouring refugee-hosting countries. The structures are intended to be agile and will be adjusted as the situation evolves. Inter-agency engagement remained central to advocacy efforts on behalf of refugees and asylum-seekers.

In support of government-led responses, an inter-agency regional refugee response plan was finalized. It brought together 142 partners across eight countries, including some 59 national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and 55 international NGOs, with combined requirements of \$1.85 billion.

Furthermore, in support of the localization of the response, UNHCR has further strengthened and expanded partnerships with a range of actors, including national NGOs, grass-roots organizations, municipalities and the private sector.

UNHCR continued to benefit from its partnership with the Union of European Football Associations to promote the social inclusion of refugees through enhanced access to sports. The first-ever Unity Cup organized by UNHCR and the Union of European Football Associations in Nyon, Switzerland brought together teams from football associations across Europe, comprised of female and male refugee and amateur national players.

C. Financial information

The budget for the activities of UNHCR in Europe for 2022, as approved by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme during its seventy-second session in October 2021, amounted to \$591.3 million.

Following the declaration of a level-3 emergency in Ukraine and neighbouring countries in February 2022, UNHCR established a supplementary budget for the Ukraine situation which

currently amounts to \$1,417 million. The supplementary budget targets people affected by the conflict in Ukraine and covers their immediate protection and humanitarian needs.

This brings the current budgetary requirement for Europe to \$1,991.6 million.

At the country level, \$729.3 million (37 per cent) of the total budget for Europe is allocated to Ukraine, with over 6.9 million internally displaced persons. Some \$349.4 million (18 per cent) is required for Türkiye, the world's largest refugee-hosting country. All together \$558.6 million (or 28 per cent of the budget) is allocated to the five countries neighbouring Ukraine (Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia), which recorded some 1.7 million refugees from Ukraine.

As of 13 September 2022, the financial needs for Europe were 70 per cent funded, including an indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions. The Ukraine situation alone is 89 per cent funded.

As a result of the Ukraine situation and its supplementary budget, which covers immediate emergency response interventions to ensure access to protection and assistance, the impact area with the highest budget allocation is: “RESPOND: Realizing basic rights in safe environments” with \$1,451 million (73 per cent of the total budget), followed by impact area “PROTECT: Attaining favourable protection environments” with \$312.4 million (16 per cent). The impact area “EMPOWER: Empowering communities and achieving gender equality” has the third highest budget allocation with \$148.3 million (7 per cent) and captures activities to strengthen community mechanisms and gender equality. The impact area “SOLVE: Securing solutions” amounts to \$79.9 million (4 per cent). Further global and regional priorities, such as accountability to affected populations, are mainstreamed in other impact areas.