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A. Situational analysis including new developments

In Europe, between January and July 2017, over 115,000 people are known to have arrived irregularly by sea, including 95,200 to Italy, 11,500 to Greece and 8,600 to Spain. The number of refugees and migrants arriving via the Mediterranean Sea decreased as compared to the same timeframe in 2016, largely due to a reduction in the numbers crossing the sea to Greece. In Italy, the overall number of arrivals during the first seven months of 2017 remained at a similar level to the previous year, while there was an increase in arrivals to Spain compared to 2016.

It is estimated that over 2,400 refugees and migrants died or went missing while crossing the Mediterranean Sea in the first seven months of the year, as compared to over 3,000 the same period in 2016. Some 17 per cent of the total arrivals by sea in Europe were children, and over a quarter of them were unaccompanied and separated. In Italy, nearly 12,700 unaccompanied and separated children made the dangerous journey across the sea between January and July 2017, representing 13 per cent of all arrivals to Italy and in line with the number that arrived during the same period in 2016.

Onward movements across Europe continued in 2017, although at a much lower rate compared to 2016. Those arriving mostly travelled from Greece to Serbia, through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or crossed from Bulgaria into Serbia in order to reach other European Union Member States. A small number of people also attempted to return to Greece from Serbia through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Turkey continues to host the largest number of refugees worldwide, with 3.1 million Syrians and 320,000 refugees and others of concern of various nationalities. Between January and June 2017, 38 European countries received some 315,500 new asylum applications, representing a 54 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2016. Over 80 per cent of these applications were lodged in European Union Member States, primarily in Germany (91,200) and Italy (46,300). Asylum applicants in 2017 mainly originated from the Syrian Arab Republic (31,650), Afghanistan (15,990) and Nigeria (14,550).

Since the conflict in Ukraine began in 2014, nearly 1.6 million people have been internally displaced and over 480,000 Ukrainians have sought asylum in other countries, including the Russian Federation (427,240), Italy (10,410), Germany (10,210), Spain (8,100), Poland (4,470), France (3,730) and Sweden (3,360). More than 1.4 million applications for other forms of legal stay were also submitted by Ukrainians, mainly in the Russian Federation, as well as in Belarus and Poland. In 2017, the situation in eastern Ukraine has further deteriorated, with security incidents on the rise.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Reforms to the CEAS and UNHCR proposals for a collective European response

Following the European Commission's proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), UNHCR issued in December 2016 a paper on "Better protecting

refugees in the EU and globally."[1] UNHCR has engaged in dialogue with European Union institutions, Member States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to further develop the proposals set out in this document. The focus has been on establishing fair and efficient asylum procedures, including accelerated and simplified procedures; on prioritizing family reunion; and on establishing a fair distribution mechanism in the context of the reform of the Dublin system. UNHCR is also advocating a common approach to unaccompanied and separated children and has provided comments on the proposal for the revision of the Eurodac Regulation.[2]

Efforts by the European Union and its Member States to stem the number of arrivals through the central Mediterranean route have continued. UNHCR calls on all stakeholders to provide access to international protection, in line with international law, to adopt protection-sensitive border management measures (including for maritime borders) and to demonstrate greater solidarity and broader regional responsibility-sharing, including for search and rescue, and disembarkation, as well as in the search for solutions. In view of the importance of the Central Mediterranean route and its cross-regional nature, the High Commissioner appointed a Special Envoy, who will work with all concerned States and other stakeholders on appropriate responses.

Safeguarding asylum space and building effective protection systems, including in the context of mixed movements

People in need of international protection continued to seek safety in Europe, despite physical and administrative restrictions, detention and other measures imposed at some borders. UNHCR has documented cases of abuse and violence by smugglers and criminal networks, incidents of push-backs by State authorities at several border points, and increasing restrictions on access to asylum in many countries both within and outside of the European Union.

In response, protection monitoring activities were increased throughout the continent, focusing on access to territory and to asylum procedures. UNHCR also increased advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring that international protection standards were reflected in border management and asylum policies, both at the national level and in the European Union. UNHCR submitted comments on draft legislation and intervened in several cases before the European Court of Human Rights to raise these concerns.

In northern Europe, UNHCR is developing a multiyear, multi-partner plan which aims to strengthen access to territory and reception; establish effective quality asylum procedures; ensure child-sensitive processes; support integration; end statelessness; and explore solutions, including through resettlement and legal pathways.

The "quality initiative" in eastern Europe provided a regional forum for governments to discuss challenges in the area of asylum, with a view to facilitating partnerships and strengthening access to territory, asylum procedures, and the quality of judicial review. The target audience included first-instance decision-makers, legal practitioners, border guards and members of the judiciary in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

In the Russian Federation, difficulties accessing asylum procedures were reported in the first half of 2017. With the integration of asylum functions into the Ministry of Interior, UNHCR hopes to further enhance cooperation with the concerned authorities and will strengthen efforts to address the current gaps.

In Ukraine, UNHCR has developed a five-year strategy covering: humanitarian and protection responses in the areas around the line of contact and the non-government controlled areas; responsible disengagement as internally displaced persons (IDPs) achieve solutions in the rest of Ukraine; and solutions for refugees and stateless persons.

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[1] Available from http://www.refworld.org/docid/58385d4e4.html.
[2] Available from http://www.refworld.org/docid/59536ec64.html.

UNHCR will prioritize advocacy, national capacity-building and community-based interventions, focussing on protection problems that affect all populations of concern.

Promoting acceptable reception conditions

In Greece, the population of concern to UNHCR totals close to 43,000, including some 34,500 refugees and asylum-seekers on the mainland and 8,500 on the islands. The living conditions for many asylum-seekers have improved, following an increase in reception places, the implementation of UNHCR's urban accommodation scheme and the closure of some sites. This UNHCR scheme, launched in 2016, has benefited some 31,800 people to date. Approximately 18,000 places, including rented apartments, rooms in buildings and hotels, and host family accommodation, are maintained at any given time. These spaces are prioritized for families, candidates for the European Union relocation programme and those with specific needs. UNHCR implements cash programming to promote self-reliance and to support the basic needs of the population.

Despite the progress achieved, systemic problems persist, particularly on the islands, where asylum-seekers are being accommodated in overcrowded reception and identification centres in poor conditions. This has led to communal tensions, security concerns and increased protection risks. Between January and June 2017, UNHCR coordinated and supported the transfer of over 5,500 asylum-seekers from the islands to the mainland.

In Italy, there have been over 95,000 new arrivals documented in 2017, the majority of whom disembarked in Sicily. UNHCR is present in the disembarkation areas in several locations, delivering information on asylum and relocation to new arrivals and supporting the authorities with the identification of persons with specific needs. The asylum and reception system is under significant pressure. Capacity in the hotspots is limited, and many asylum-seekers reside in emergency facilities which are not adequate for long-term accommodation. There are currently an estimated 200,000 individuals in regular and emergency reception facilities.

UNHCR supported Serbia's efforts to accommodate and provide assistance to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers and migrants. As of the end of July 2017, 94 per cent of some 4,700 persons were accommodated in government-run long-term facilities. UNHCR is working with the authorities to strengthen reception conditions, notably with regards to gender segregation and safe sleeping areas for women and children.

Enhancing child protection

The increasing number of unaccompanied and separated children arriving in Europe has highlighted the challenges faced in implementing existing child protection standards and legal frameworks. Despite strong protection standards, delays and inefficiencies in implementing legal avenues and providing adequate care; harmonizing procedures within the European Union; and obtaining support for family reunification and foster arrangements, along with limited integration prospects, have prevented the effective protection of unaccompanied and separated children and heightened the uncertainty over their future. As a result, many children undertake irregular onward movements, increasing the risk of abuse, violence and exploitation.

To address protection gaps affecting unaccompanied and separated children, priority areas for intervention include identification and registration; holistic age assessment procedures; rapid and effective guardianship systems, including through the use of cultural mediators; access to age-appropriate care arrangements; and effective family reunification procedures.

In October 2016, UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) established a consultative process to support States and other actors in their response to the needs of unaccompanied and separated children. The process involved over 90 practitioners, affected children, several European governments and representatives of the European Commission. The recommendations are captured in a report[3] published in July 2017, which provides guidance for implementation.

Preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence

The high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), both en route to Europe and in onward movements across the continent, remains a major concern and demonstrates the pervasiveness and severity of the risks that asylum-seekers face while seeking international protection. Based on information gathered, including at disembarkation points where UNHCR is present, in refugee status determination (RSD) interviews and during monitoring visits to reception centres, many women who arrive by sea have been affected by SGBV. Furthermore, some persons of concern (including children of both genders) risk being forced to engage in harmful coping strategies, such as survival sex and forced marriage. Reliance on smuggling networks, inappropriate reception conditions and the use of detention, compound the risk of SGBV.

Preventing and responding to SGBV is a key priority for the Office, and operational prevention and response strategies include strengthening coordination mechanisms, broadening the partnership base and referral pathways, and monitoring reception conditions to ensure appropriate safeguards. In some countries, particularly in eastern Europe, there is little recourse or support under national laws for SGBV survivors, and many incidents are not reported. UNHCR and partners are engaged in counselling as well as awareness-raising activities among affected communities.

Securing solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons

UNHCR continued to advocate the expansion of safe pathways to Europe, including through resettlement, humanitarian admission, community-based private sponsorships, student scholarships and labour mobility programmes. Negotiations progressed on the European Commission proposal for a Union Resettlement Framework,[4] with continued engagement with all stakeholders to inform the legislative process. UNHCR continued to participate in negotiations on the establishment of a European Union Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme with Turkey and provided inputs to Member State planning for resettlement in 2018, based on projected global resettlement needs[5] and on specific situational needs such as those related to the central Mediterranean route.

As of April 2017, 25 European countries had made available nearly 120,600 places for resettlement or other forms of admission for Syrian refugees, since 2013.[6] With respect to the status of the Council of the European Union's conclusions of July 2015 on resettling 22,504 displaced persons from outside the European Union who are in clear need of international protection, through multilateral and national schemes, nearly 17,200 people had been resettled under this scheme as of July 2017. Some 7,800 persons were also

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[3] Available from http://www.refworld.org/docid/59633afc4.html.

[4] UNHCR provided observations and recommendations on the proposed Union Resettlement Framework, which are available from http://www.refworld.org/docid/5890b1d74.html.

[5] "UNHCR projected global resettlement needs 2018" is available from http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/593a88f27/unhcr-projected-global-resettlement-needs-2018.html.

[6] See UNHCR's factsheet on resettlement and other admission pathways for Syrian refugees, available from http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/573dc82d4/resettlement-other-admission-pathways-syrian-refugees.html.

resettled from Turkey (3,560 through the scheme) in the framework of the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016.[7]

Under the European Union's emergency relocation scheme, over 24,500 asylum-seekers have been relocated from Greece and Italy as of July 2017, including 16,800 from Greece (out of 66,400 originally foreseen) and nearly 7,900 from Italy (out of 39,600 originally foreseen). Participating States are expected to continue to relocate all those who arrive and who are eligible for relocation in Greece and Italy up until 26 September 2017. UNHCR is advocating that participating States fulfil their commitments, as a sign of European solidarity.

With regard to persons displaced in South-East Europe by the 1990s conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, support was provided to foster durable solutions for those still in need. State engagement is particularly required for vulnerable groups, including Roma and other minorities. UNHCR continues to offer legal counselling for all those in need of solutions or who are at risk of becoming stateless.

In Ukraine, despite the difficulties faced by IDPs, reports indicate that some 26 per cent of the displaced have no intention of returning to their places of origin and prefer to locally integrate[8]. Between January 2016 and April 2017, as a result of newly introduced verification procedures for persons who reside in non-government controlled areas, over 568,000 Ukrainian citizens living in those areas were deprived of their pensions, causing financial hardship. UNHCR continued to closely cooperate with the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons and to provide protection and assistance for the affected population. UNHCR advocates the adoption of a long-term strategy focusing on solutions for IDPs and the implementation of all possible measures to protect the human rights of persons living in the non-government controlled areas.

In the southern Caucasus, UNHCR continued to work with concerned governments to protect the rights of IDPs, including the right to return to their places of origin in safety and dignity. In early 2017, UNHCR facilitated the visit of a delegation from Ukraine to Georgia to discuss IDP responses. In Georgia, UNHCR advocated measures to increase freedom of movement for IDPs, improve their situation in displacement and strengthen local integration. The Office welcomed the efforts by the Governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia to facilitate durable housing solutions for IDPs and to strengthen social inclusion. The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh at the line of contact has become more tense and, while no displacement has been so far observed, UNHCR will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Preventing and resolving situations of statelessness

UNHCR continued to advocate action to address statelessness through interventions with the European Union's Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum and the European Parliament. In April 2017, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on "addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of the EU External Action Service."[9] The resolution recognizes statelessness as a significant human rights challenge, and asks the Commission and the European Union External Action Service to fight statelessness in all external actions.

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[7] See https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170726_factsheet_relocation_and_resettlement_en.pdf.

[8] See the "National monitoring system report on the situation of internally displaced persons" of April 2017, available from http://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/national-monitoring-system-report-situation-internally-displaced-persons-april-2017.

[9] See European Parliament, European Parliament resolution of 5 April 2017 on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action (2015/2342(INI)), available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2017-0124&language=EN&ring=A8-2017-0045

UNHCR and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) consolidated their cooperation on statelessness through joint activities in south-eastern Europe, the southern Caucasus and eastern Europe. These efforts culminated in the launch of a handbook on international standards and best practices in the OSCE area[10], which also draws on the experience of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM).

Following the adoption of a regulation implementing the law on foreigners, Bulgaria began applying statelessness determination procedures. UNHCR continued to provide technical support to countries preparing to adopt or implement statelessness determination procedures, including Greece, Montenegro and Ukraine.

UNHCR and UNICEF developed joint strategies to address childhood statelessness in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well as Kosovo[11]. UNHCR supported the European Network on Statelessness (ENS) with the organization of a regional conference, where the ENS launched a report on protecting stateless persons from arbitrary detention.[12] UNHCR published a report on stateless persons in detention, a tool for their identification and enhanced protection.[13]

Strengthening external relations and mobilizing support

UNHCR continued to strengthen partnerships with multiple stakeholders, including in the context of the Mediterranean situation. This included joint advocacy and resource mobilization efforts. UNHCR developed tools to provide information on the situation of refugees arriving in Europe and its response, including through its data and information portal[14]. UNHCR also expanded its collaboration with private sector partners to support refugee integration and explore access to durable solutions through employment opportunities in Europe.

In its capacity as co-chair of the Issue-based Coalition on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), an action plan was presented to the meeting of Regional Directors in May 2017. Members of the coalition are now identifying from their respective mandates, joint advocacy opportunities and shared key messages on refugee and migration issues in Europe, as well as central Asia.

In south-eastern Europe, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have worked closely to develop a regional framework to address the needs of individuals arriving in mixed movements. In Ukraine, UNHCR continued working within the inter-agency framework for IDPs, leading the protection and shelter clusters. UNHCR maintained close partnerships with the OSCE, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and several international and national NGOs in both Government-controlled and non-Government controlled areas.

C. Financial information

The budget for Europe approved by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, during its sixty seventh session in October 2016 amounted to $891.7 million for 2017. By the end of July, the budget stood at $827.8 million, a decrease which reflects revised requirements in Turkey in response to the Syria situation.

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[10] See http://www.osce.org/handbook/statelessness-in-the-OSCE-area.

[11] References to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of Security Council resolution 1244(1999).

[12] Available from http://www.statelessness.eu/sites/www.statelessness.eu/files/attachments/resources/ENS_LockeInLimbo_Detention_Agenda_online.pdf.

[13] UNHCR, Stateless Persons in Detention: A tool for their identification and enhanced protection, June 2017, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/598adacd4.html.

[14] See http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean.

Thirty-five per cent of the budget for Europe was allocated to the central Mediterranean routes situation for Europe (former Europe emergency and Europe and North Africa situation) and was included in the "Regional refugee and migrant response plan for Europe", while 37 per cent was allocated for Syrian refugees. At the subregional level, 52 per cent of the overall budget was allocated to operations in eastern Europe, 7 per cent to south-eastern Europe, and 41 per cent to central, northern, southern and western Europe.

As of 31 July 2017, contributions totalling $406.2 million towards the region's 2017 financial requirements had been recorded. The central Mediterranean routes situation for Europe is 79.3 per cent funded ($232.9 million) for the region.

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