**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

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A.   Situational analysis including new developments

UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Europe covers 46 countries and works with a range of regional organizations, including the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. In 2016, UNHCR continued to support governments to maintain a protection regime that meets international standards and advocates for the rights of asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons, while maintaining a robust emergency response. The operating environment in 2016 remained challenging, marked by continuing large-scale arrivals across the Mediterranean and increasingly restrictive measures in relation to access to territory, reception conditions, quality of asylum procedures, and integration. These developments were monitored closely by the Office in both European Union and non-European Union countries. UNHCR also provided comments on draft national and regional legislation.

Asylum and internal displacement

Between January and June 2016, 38 European countries received nearly 625,000 asylum applications, a 22 per cent increase compared to the same period last year. Over 90 per cent of these applications were lodged in European Union Member States, notably in Germany (434,700) and Italy (49,400). Turkey continued to host the largest number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate worldwide, with 2.7 million Syrian refugees as of end of August 2016. The number of refugees and asylum-seekers remaining in Greece increased, with more than 11,300 individuals dispersed on the islands and an estimated 38,900 people on the mainland at the end of August 2016. Those who lodged asylum applications in Europe in 2016 mainly originated from the Syrian Arab Republic (216,900), Afghanistan (128,000) and Iraq (94,300)[1].

As a result of the persistent conflict in Ukraine, more than 1.7 million people were registered as internally displaced as of August 2016[2], according to the Government. As of September 2016, and since the beginning of the conflict, some 1.4 million Ukrainians sought asylum or other forms of legal stay in neighbouring countries, with the majority in the Russian Federation (1.1 million) and Belarus (139,200), as well as in Germany (8,000), Italy (7,300), Poland (5,300), France (3,200) and Sweden (2,700).

B.   Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Supporting the collective European response

The surge in arrivals continues to present challenges to the effective functioning of the Common European Asylum System, and the response of some States, particularly with respect to increasingly restrictive measures in relation to family reunification, border controls and detention, has called into question international solidarity.

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[1] The way statistical information is recorded in Europe includes several instances of double-counting due to registration in more than one country.
[2] United Nations agencies use an IDP planning figure of approximately 800,000 to 1,000,000 persons, as outlined in the inter-agency humanitarian response plan (HRP) launched at the beginning of 2016.

Further to the launch of the European Agenda on Migration in May 2015, the European Commission proposed in the first half of 2016 an extensive reform agenda to address the ongoing challenges to the Common European Asylum System. These proposals aimed to establish a sustainable and fair asylum system, including through an overhaul of the Dublin system; reinforce the regulation that allows for the identification of asylum applicants (the EURODAC system); and achieve greater convergence in the asylum system. UNHCR remained engaged in this process through regular meetings and consultations with the Commission and the European Parliament.

Ensuring an effective emergency response

The unpredictability of movements, continuously shifting travel routes, and the high level of mobility among refugees made the distribution of assistance and protection interventions for people with specific needs challenging. Furthermore, the Mediterranean crisis required UNHCR to rapidly expand its operations in countries where it had previously had a predominantly advocacy role. In order to obtain the necessary funding, UNHCR launched four separate appeals, including one focused on winterization efforts, as well as an inter-agency refugee and migrant response plan (RMRP)[3]. The RMRP aims to support governments in further developing and operationalizing a sustainable, comprehensive and cooperative framework for concrete action in relation to refugee protection and migration management, which is consistent with international and European standards. The Office is implementing this plan in close cooperation with the European Commission and relevant European Union entities.

In Greece, relief efforts initially focused on the provision of immediate, life-saving assistance, in support of the response of the government and local communities. UNHCR worked closely with the European Union border agency, FRONTEX, and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) to ensure access to asylum and the provision of protection-centred assistance, including safe and dignified reception conditions, relocation efforts and family reunification, where relevant. UNHCR and EASO supported the Greek Asylum Service in carrying out a pre-registration exercise, resulting in the pre-registration of nearly 27,600 individuals. This helped ensure that persons of concern on the Greek mainland were able to pursue available legal options to find protection in the country or elsewhere.

Significant challenges remain to ensure that all sites in Greece meet minimum reception standards. UNHCR, together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), established child and family support hubs (referred to as "blue dots"), bringing service providers together under a common structure throughout Greece. The blue dots helped address the protection concerns of unaccompanied and separated children, as well as survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and persons with specific needs.

In Turkey, UNHCR, together with United Nations partners, the Turkish Red Crescent, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supported the Government's response efforts by providing refugees with food packages, dry clothes, blankets, and hygiene materials; water, sanitation and hygiene facilities; containers for waiting areas and storage; and interpretation assistance. UNHCR's response focused on the following areas: identifying persons with specific needs and ensuring their referral to specialized services; strengthening outreach and monitoring, so that those intercepted had access to asylum procedures and international protection; providing legal assistance; and working with the government to identify alternatives to detention.

Safeguarding asylum space in the broader migration context: access to territory for persons of concern and acceptable reception conditions

UNHCR has been advocating that international protection standards be reflected in the European Union border management policy, especially in light of the ongoing

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[3] The RMRP total requirements for 2016 amount to US$ 670 million (including US$ 380.3 million for UNHCR), with 54 per cent funded as of July 2016.

transformation of FRONTEX into the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and hopes that this will have a positive impact on protection space, including stronger monitoring of external borders. Through its chairmanship of the FRONTEX Consultative forum on fundamental rights, UNHCR led advocacy efforts in this regard, for example, by responding to instances of push-backs, abuse and other concerns about practices that compromise access to international protection in the European Union.

Large numbers of refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean in 2015, with more than 1 million making the dangerous sea crossing, including over 850,000 who arrived in Greece from Turkey. Despite this, political developments in February 2016 changed the situation. The establishment of tighter border restrictions between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece, along the western Balkans route, led to its effective closure on 8 March 2016. The EU-Turkey statement, which came into force on 18 March 2016, set out measures to control irregular movements from Turkey to Greece and contributed to a substantial reduction of sea arrivals[4]. It also resulted in the return of over 480 individuals, mainly from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan to Turkey. To date, some 50 Syrians have voluntarily returned. None of those returned were registered asylum-seekers.

In the Balkans, irregular movements resumed and groups of people began to gather at various border points, including at the Serbia-Hungary border, where physical barriers and legal restrictions had been established. UNHCR remains concerned that individuals moving irregularly in Central Europe and the western Balkans are exposed to abuse and violence at the hands of smugglers and criminal organizations.

In April 2016, restrictions on access to asylum and protection were put into place in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, while other countries, including Austria and Denmark, increased the time required to apply for family reunification. Other European Union States shifted from granting refugee status to providing subsidiary protection, with limited options for family reunification – an issue of serious concern considering the high number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied and separated children.

In northern Europe, UNHCR continued to work towards improving access to asylum and territory through border monitoring, capacity building of border guards, and improved access to procedures. UNHCR advocated access to territory, durable solutions and alternative forms of admission, appropriate reception conditions and alternatives to detention.

UNHCR reiterated its willingness and availability to assist the authorities in France to improve the reception conditions of potential asylum-seekers and migrants in Calais and Dunkirk.

In southern Europe, UNHCR continued supporting the European Union's relocation efforts from Italy, while working towards the establishment of adequate reception conditions and procedures that are sensitive to the specific needs of asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR also ensured regular presence in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

UNHCR also focused on monitoring access to territory and procedures, and on counteracting the increasingly negative and xenophobic media portrayals of refugees, particularly in countries receiving refugees through the European relocation scheme.

Building and maintaining fair and effective asylum and protection systems

Operations in Central Europe and the western Balkans refocused their response on protection monitoring, advocacy and the building of national protection systems after

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[4] There were nearly 1,500 sea arrivals in July, compared to just under 27,000 in March. However, the number of arrivals to Italy remained consistent with those of 2015: as of 26 August 2016, over 105,000 persons arrived by sea in Italy, compared to the over 116,100 persons who disembarked at the end of August 2016. As of 26 August, 162,730 individuals had arrived in Greece from Turkey, with top nationalities of origin including Syrians (48 per cent), Afghans (25 per cent), and Iraqis (15 per cent).

efforts were shifted to Greece. Services and activities were recalibrated to match the lower numbers of people using the western Balkans route.

In some eastern European countries, access to asylum procedures remained challenging. UNHCR was concerned about the increasing reliance on national security as grounds for rejecting applications. While complementary forms of protection were introduced across the region, enhancing the protection of persons fleeing generalized violence, decision-makers too often granted complementary protection to applicants who may have met the Convention refugee definition and who, thus, were entitled to a wider range of rights. In certain countries, legislative frameworks had the effect of restricting the activities and funding of NGOs, jeopardizing their ability to provide vital support to asylum-seekers and refugees.

The rising number of unaccompanied and separated children is of particular concern to UNHCR. In addition to contributing to the development of the EASO best interest assessment tool for relocation, benchmarks and indicators for reception, the Office received a grant from the European Commission to develop a project aimed at enhancing the protection of unaccompanied and separated children in the European Union. In this regard, UNHCR conducted a profiling survey of Afghan unaccompanied and separated children in Sweden to obtain a greater understanding of their reasons for applying for asylum in Europe.

In April 2016, the Turkish Government and UNHCR began to transition from a UNHCR-led refugee status determination procedure for non-Syrian asylum-seekers to a government-led process. UNHCR will continue to register and conduct refugee status determination for this population, until the hand-over is complete.

Phase two of the "Asylum Systems Quality Initiative" in Eastern Europe and the southern Caucasus (2015-2017) will focus on addressing outstanding gaps in the refugee status determination procedure, improving access to asylum and enhancing the quality of judicial review. The target audience of the initiative was expanded to border guards and members of the judiciary, in addition to first-instance decision-makers in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Large-scale arrivals also exacerbated the response of some European Union countries, which increasingly resorted to detention. UNHCR notes the increasing importance of interim measures under Rule 39 of the Rules of the European Court of Human Rights in safeguarding against risks of refoulement, particularly for persons of concern in some countries in Eastern Europe.

UNHCR also worked with Eritrean and Somali diaspora communities to alert people about the risks associated with irregular travel by sea to Europe. This was achieved through the development of an e-platform, "Telling the real story",[5] which went live in January 2016 and which has reached an estimated 600,000 persons by June.

Securing durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)

UNHCR continued to advocate the establishment of predictable pathways for admission to Europe. As of August 2016, 25 European countries had made over 110,200 places available for resettlement and other pathways for admission for Syrian refugees, out of a total of approximately 221,800 places pledged globally.[6] The European Union and associated States participated in the expedited resettlement of Syrians out of Turkey. Negotiations to adopt standard operating procedures for the "Voluntary humanitarian admission scheme" from Turkey for persons displaced by the Syria conflict continued. In Germany, the Office provided individual, accurate and timely information to people of concern on the asylum process and procedures, while continuing to support the German Government's humanitarian admission programme. The European Commission launched

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[5] The platform is available from http://tellingtherealstory.org/.

[6] More information on States' efforts towards resettlement and other pathways for admission of Syrian refugees is available from http://www.unhcr.org/573dc82d4.html.

an action plan on the integration of third-country nationals, which could form the basis for improved integration outcomes for persons of concern.

Given the increasing resettlement needs globally, increased opportunities for resettlement and other pathways for admission to Europe are urgently needed. Despite the adoption of the conclusions on resettlement by the Council of the European Union in July 2015 for over 22,500 persons, the European Union-Turkey statement led to some countries initially dedicating their quotas to Syrians in Turkey. The implementation of relocation schemes fell short of the objectives, with just 3.75 per cent of the 106,000 available places from Greece and Italy filled as of August 2016.[7]

UNHCR is in the process of responsibly disengaging from providing direct assistance to persons displaced in South-Eastern Europe by the conflicts during the 1990s. The Office is supporting governments in the region to fully assume responsibility for securing durable solutions for those still in need and will continue to engage at the strategic policy level, regionally and nationally, in these efforts.

Preventing and resolving situations of statelessness

The Council of the European Union adopted its first conclusions on statelessness in December 2015, which proposed the European Migration Network as a platform to exchange information and good practices. UNHCR supports the Network in its efforts to implement the conclusions through conferences and the drafting of a regional report. In March, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted resolution 2099 on the need to eradicate the situation of statelessness of children.

A good practices paper on action six of UNHCR's global action plan to end statelessness, published by UNHCR in July, describes the ten statelessness determination procedures in Europe. Armenia, Bulgaria, Italy and the Netherlands are currently looking into establishing such a procedure or improving their existing procedures. In Greece and Iceland, legislative amendments have resulted in an improved protection situation for stateless persons, while legislation adopted in Ukraine extends the validity of permanent residence permits for stateless persons from one to ten years. Italy acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in December 2015. Romania adopted legislation simplifying late birth registration, contributing to the prevention of statelessness.

Strengthening UNHCR's external relations and mobilizing support for the work of the Office worldwide and for persons of concern

A central feature of UNHCR's response to the Mediterranean emergency situation was the strengthening of partnerships with multiple stakeholders, including governments, regional institutions, United Nations agencies, civil society and NGOs. The Office, working together with partners and affected States, focused on raising awareness on the situation of people in need of international protection arriving in Europe, particularly those with specific needs. This required increased advocacy in calling for a coordinated and comprehensive response in Europe to address the situation and in urging an approach based on solidarity and responsibility-sharing among States. UNHCR developed a range of tools to provide information and data on the emergency situation and its response. The RMRP constituted a valuable platform to coordinate joint advocacy with partners, as well as to mobilize resources for inter-agency efforts.

C.   Financial information

During its sixty-sixth plenary session in October 2015, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) approved a budget for Europe of

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[7] Member States' support to the emergency relocation mechanism is available from: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material/docs/state_of_play_-_relocation_en.pdf?referrer=justicewire.

$516.9 million for 2016. As of end-August 2016 the budget stood at $878.5 million, reflecting an increase of $361.6 million due to supplementary budgets for the Europe crisis, as well as the Syria and Ukraine situations.

The current budget includes revised financial requirements for UNHCR's initial response plan for the refugee crisis in Europe (former "special Mediterranean initiative") presented in August 2016 and covering the period until December 2016, amounting to $374.6 million.

By 31 August 2016, contributions received amounted to $398 million, leaving a $480.5 million funding gap. This affects UNHCR's ability to deliver assistance and protection to persons of concern, in particular those displaced due to the conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine.