



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1411 Vienna, 16 February 2023

EU Statement in response to the address by the UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Ms Gillian Triggs

1. The European Union warmly welcomes to the Permanent Council UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Ms Gillian Triggs.
2. Approximately 103 million people around the world, the highest figure recorded since the Second World War, are currently uprooted from their homes and villages, from schools and livelihoods, separated from family, from friends, from the familiar. Through them, we witness the devastating effects of war and increasing conflicts, climate emergency, pandemics, as well as energy and food crises. We highly value the work of UNHCR across the globe, which focuses not only on providing humanitarian aid to those in need, but also helping the displaced and refugees to return to their place of origin through practical and tangible support.

Mr. Chair,

3. Russia's ongoing illegal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine resulted in the fastest and largest displacement witnessed in decades, with approximately 14 million people being forced to flee their homes since the 24th of February 2022, exacerbating an already grim situation in Europe and the OSCE area. Displaced persons may have limited access to education, financial resources or

opportunities for income generation, which provides a fertile environment for human trafficking and exploitation. The overwhelming majority of those fleeing the conflict are women and children and thus particularly vulnerable to risks of gender-based violence, exploitation and human trafficking. We appreciate UNHCR's work aimed at alleviating the effects of this crisis and strongly advocate for the primary importance of securing unhindered access of humanitarian organisations to the affected population.

4. The EU and its Member States reacted swiftly following the full-scale Russian invasion and adopted efficient policies in welcoming Ukrainian refugees. The Temporary Protection directive, activated in March 2022, provides immediate and collective protection for displaced Ukrainians and includes residence permits, access to the labour market and housing, medical assistance, and access to education for children. The directive has been accompanied by a Common Anti-Trafficking Plan in an effort to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and to support potential victims. We remain committed to join forces to pursue an effective human rights-based, victim-centred, gender sensitive and age-specific anti-trafficking strategy. We particularly commend the Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings for their timely recommendations, as well as ODIHR for their assistance in this regard. In co-operation with the UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other relevant bodies, the EU Member States ensure that a prompt and concrete response to the needs of children and their families is provided for, with special attention to unaccompanied children.
5. The EU has also stepped up its support to the Republic of Moldova, which has been severely affected by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU Member States have accepted refugees to their territory in order to relieve the pressure faced by Moldova's public and non-governmental sector.
6. The EU works closely with UNHCR on refugee and asylum issues with the primary goal of enhancing asylum capacity-building and refugee protection in non-EU countries. The resolve of the EU and its Member States to protect and promote the rights of refugees, displaced persons and migrants, has been the cornerstone of the EU asylum and migration policies. The EU's action focuses on providing protection in humanitarian crises, facilitating access to international protection, combatting trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants, combatting the

instrumentalisation of asylum seekers and refugees, providing support for host communities, as well as addressing the root causes that compel people to leave their homes, including by eradicating poverty and creating opportunities in their countries of origin, in the spirit of global burden and responsibility sharing.

7. We also greatly value UNHCR's work in other parts of the world, as we should not lose sight of other regions where conflict has driven people from their homes. Protracted crises such as in Syria and Afghanistan, which also affect OSCE participating States, have resulted in huge population flows and displacement, internally and externally.
8. Syrian refugees and displaced persons are also gravely affected by the recent devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, where UNHCR is actively providing support and relief. The EU and its Member States have also rapidly responded to their plight, mobilising their teams and providing emergency assistance on the ground, as well as humanitarian aid, while, as it was announced, the European Commission and the Swedish Presidency of the Council will co-host a Donors' Conference in March to mobilise funds from the international community in support of the people of Türkiye and Syria.

Mr. Chair,

9. Displacement is becoming increasingly complex. New factors, such as climate emergency, have been added to the traditional drivers of displacement. Climate change and environmental degradation negatively affect stability and security, and may also lead to exacerbating tensions and provoke conflicts. Our response to the climate crisis must thus take into account this link to conflict and displacement.
10. In light of this, it is imperative for the international community not only to remain steadfast in its support to the displaced, but also to address the root causes that drive people to flee their homes and separate them from their homelands.
11. In this respect, we particularly commend the OSCE's work in all three dimensions in providing participating States with a useful toolbox to tackle these challenges in a comprehensive manner.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the

Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.