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**CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**REPORT\***

**“Social Impact of Refugee Crisis in the BSEC Member States”**

Rapporteur: Mr. Ramin MAMMADOV, member of the Committee (Azerbaijan)

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Migration today is a topical socio-political problem, intertwined with development and geopolitics at the national, regional and international levels. Wars and violence significantly raise the level of population mobility on a global scale. A huge number of migrants and displaced people around the world are in need of protection and assistance. Unfortunately, the number of displaced persons and refugees continues to grow even during the pandemic and quarantine. At the peak of the pandemic in 2020, more than 160 countries closed their borders, and in the framework of the pandemic restrictions, many states were unable to provide people in need with timely protection.

2. For many years conflicts, wars, human rights violations, social inequalities, have increased the number of refugees worldwide. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of people forced to flee their homes has increased every year and today reached the highest level. This trend that can be halted through concerted efforts by international community and dialogue for establishing peace in the context major global transformations. By the end of 2021, those displaced by war, violence, persecution, and human rights abuses stood at 89.3 million, up 8 per cent on a year earlier and well over double the figure of 10 years ago, according to UNHCR's annual Global Trends Report. The military conflict between Russia and Ukraine caused the fastest flow of forced displacement since World War II and pushed the figure over the dramatic milestone of 100 million.

3. An increasing number of states, including the countries of the Wider Black Sea Region, are involved in migration processes, and there are practically no countries left that would not be affected by migration problems and its consequences. The big migration flows from Syria, Iraq and the last wave from Afghanistan passed through the Black Sea Region. The largest number of refugees is currently concentrated in Türkiye - more than 3.7 million Syrians, and hundreds of thousands of refugees from other countries. Since 2011, Syrians fled the conflict in their homeland and found themselves in Türkiye seeking asylum, and the Turkish government has provided them with temporary protection. Among them, 7% are located in temporary shelters, and the rest are scattered across 81 provinces of Türkiye and live among the local population. At the international level it is necessary to coordinate the efforts in resolving acute and problematic situations caused by excessive migration.

4. Since the beginning of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, nearly one-third of Ukrainians have been forced from their homes. This is one of the largest migration crises in the world today. Within Ukraine, nearly 7 million people remain displaced by the war. As of today, UNHCR estimates there are over 7 million refugees present across Europe. Over 3.9 million refugees from Ukraine have registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes. More than 11.9 million movements out of Ukraine have been recorded since 24 February, with over 5.3 million movements back into the country.

5. The refugee presence in host countries has potential social, economic, and political impacts and is of particular concern to governments. Many countries have reformed their healthcare and social protection systems with due regard to the refugee factor. The large scale of new resettlement calls for the need for solidarity and common objective in preventing and managing crises and ensuring that refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum seekers are adequately protected.

6. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation shares global concern over the refugee problems. The PABSEC recalls its Reports and Recommendations on "Rights and Social Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons" (21/1997), on "Migration in the BSEC Member States – Social and Cultural Aspects" (32/2009) and on "Problems of Refugees,

Displaced Persons and Irregular Migrants in the BSEC Member States – Social Aspects” (151/2016), where the Assembly emphasizes that the increase in the number of refugees has serious consequences for the socio-economic development of the countries in the Black Sea Region.

7. The PABSEC Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee decided to focus on the topic “Social Impact of Refugee Crisis in the BSEC Member States” at its 59<sup>th</sup> Meeting. Contributions to the Report were received from the national delegations of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Türkiye and Ukraine. In addition, the updated contributions were sent by the national delegation of the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Republic of Türkiye and Ukraine. Reference material was also obtained from the official websites of UN, the Council of Europe, and other relevant international organizations.

## **II. SOCIAL IMPACT OF REFUGEE CRISIS IN THE BSEC MEMBER STATES**

8. The term refugee in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, applies to any person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. Internally displaced persons are defined as persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

9. The social impacts of refugees are specific to the concrete countries and imply inequalities between refugees and local communities resulting social tensions. Upon arrival the refugees require accommodation, housing, and key public services such as health care and education. Sooner or later, refugees seek to provide for their own livelihood, look for job and interact with the host economy in multiple ways. It is important for the host country authorities to manage economic interactions between refugees and residents so that no group of residents incur any losses while refugees can live with dignity and in peace.

10. The growing migratory pressure on the host countries poses a serious challenge to their economy and to their security, health and social systems. In order to deal with these negatives, the governments shape effective single national policies to manage migration processes, develop strategies and take actions to integrate the refugees. Unfortunately, the countries' capacity is not enough to face these challenges individually. The role of the international solidarity is vital and requires strong collaboration between the governmental structures and the international humanitarian organizations and NGOs.

11. The Black Sea Region has in the last 5 years witnessed an increasing trend of migrants and refugee's transit. Ever since mixed migration flows into the region started to grow in 2015, the so-called Balkan Route has become one of the main routes for migrants and refugees, coming mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria and Morocco, travelling through Türkiye and trying to reach the EU. In 2020, the Western Balkans remained a transit route for mixed flows of migrants on their way to reach their final destinations in EU countries. The number of registered migrants and refugees in the region has increased significantly in the recent years and has remained high despite measures related to the prevention of Covid-19 spread.

12. The impacts of large influxes of refugees in neighboring countries can be both negative and positive, and the dynamic between positive and negative factors is complex and varies depending on the concrete situations. Addressing the impacts of forced displacement therefore requires an understanding of the political economy of the host countries and the implications of the refugee situations in those societies.

13. The human right of equality before the law forms a foundation of international human rights laws to ban the discrimination against refugees based on their status as such. According to it, people have the right to social protection as recognized by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The refugees are being one of the most endangered group of people, who are permanently threatened during flight and upon their relocation in camps and during their return to their countries of origin or nationality. In the initial phase, they often lose all their belongings, their family and often their own lives. For the majority of refugees, life in exile is as bad as or worse than the conditions in their own country which forced them to escape.

14. The social protection is not consistently available to the refugees, enabling access to basic social benefits and rights is one of the functions of the national legislation and policy, which depends on the willingness and the capacity of the governments to promote inclusive social protection. The refugee problems have increasingly been the focus of discussions and debates at all levels for the assessment of the real challenges and opportunities. The growing migratory pressure on all countries poses a serious challenge to their economy and to their security, health and social systems. In order to deal with these negatives, the Governments shape effective single national policies to manage migration processes, develop strategies and take actions to integrate refugees.

15. The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the refugee crisis, since it has aggravated the social inequalities, access to healthcare, education and employment. Due to the official regulations to contain the Covid-19 spread, the procedures for settling the refugees were slowed down. The capacities for reception, identification, protection, integration, particularly alternative care options for unaccompanied children, stayed insufficient. According to UNICEF research the vulnerable children, young people and families were living in unsafe and overcrowded accommodations, unable to access protection, and legal protection. Furthermore, the 2020 pandemic lockdowns and movement restrictions have generated overcrowded reception facilities, disrupted provision of critical services, restricted asylum procedures and family reunification, and continue to create challenges in 2021. As a result of the overloading of the social and healthcare systems, the refugees faced barriers in accessing the basic social protection and human rights in the host countries. These challenges caused negative effect on the social integration of refugees.

16. The social protection has been brought to the centre of national and international migration policy debates. Migration policy is an integral component related to the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons, which are considered and resolved in accordance with the legal status of citizens, based on the constitutional and legal norms and characteristics of various categories of individuals. Migration policy is a set of measures that relate to the sphere of public administration, controlled by representative power and aimed at streamlining migration processes. One of the most important parts of this policy is the migration principles - a unified system of measures and regulatory mechanisms. These measures can become both stimulating and restraining migration activity and are aimed at creating conditions that can facilitate the voluntary adoption of decisions by people that are in line with the national interests of the state. This policy consists of a set of rules and measures aimed at regulating civil and public relations.

17. Even though the social protection is a key policy tool for building resilience, combating poverty and improving economic and social conditions refugees often face significant challenges in enjoying access to education. The access and active involvement of refugees in education system is a guarantee for their successful adaptation. Through national and international programmes refugees are entitled to full access, training and education at state and municipal schools. Refugee children and adults are involved in different intensive language studies, cultural events and integration programs.

18. Granting refugees, the right to work, which is stipulated in international conventions, as well as certain domestic legal instruments, decreases their dependence on the state support. Usually, the employment is key for integration. However, legal, administrative and practical barriers prevent many refugees from realizing their right to work. Refugees often lack the means or the willingness to pursue their legal entitlements to work or to protection in the workplace. They often lack information on their rights and on relevant law. It is also important to be update with the database of employers offering jobs to persons granted international protection, programs and measures for employment preservation and promotion, opportunities for psychological assistance, occupational guidance, inclusion in adult education and in programs for employment and training.

19. Creating migrant-friendly social protection policies require additional financial resources especially in the countries with limited public budgets. Bilateral and multilateral international partnerships are often fundamental in responding to this challenge, helping secure positive outcomes for both refugees and host communities. International financial programs address the demands created by the refugee crises.

20. The EU provides needs-based humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups of refugees. Some BSEC Member States, which are also the EU Members, are following the Decisions in the framework of the migration policies adopted by the EU. The funding for humanitarian aid operations is intended also for countries outside of the EU. The rest BSEC Member States, which are hosting refugees are provided with humanitarian assistance, funded by the EU, UN agencies, international organisations and NGOs. The humanitarian aid covers intervention areas such as: food, shelter, healthcare, water and sanitation, and education.

## **II. INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND LEGAL STANDARDS, APPLICABLE TO REFUGEES**

21. The international human rights standards, applicable to refugees may be found in a variety of legal instruments. All legislative documents, national strategies and initiatives in the BSEC Member States, concerning the refugee issues, are in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention, Related to the Status of Refugees. It is the first international agreement covering the most fundamental aspects of a refugee's life. In 2021, the world community marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

22. **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** was created in 1951 to assist in the international protection of refugees. The organization's primary objective is to ensure that all persons can exercise the right to seek asylum to secure safe refuge in another state, and to return home voluntarily. UNHCR is the only international organization mandated to protect refugees around the world and is committed to finding durable solutions for refugees to return to normal life. UNHCR is actively working to strengthen the process of reintegration of refugees returning to their country of origin, thereby preventing the recurrence of situations that could lead to refugee flows. In all its activities, UNHCR pays particular attention to the

needs of children and promotes the equal rights of women. In its efforts to protect refugees and find solutions to their problems, UNHCR works with governments and regional organizations, as well as international and non-governmental organizations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the UNHCR has supported hospitals and other health structures in areas where refugees live. To ensure a coordinated response in the main refugee-hosting countries, UNHCR co-led the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for 2021. Whereas states bear the primary responsibility for respecting and securing the fundamental rights of every person within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction, the role of UNHCR in the field of international protection is primarily to ensure that governments take the necessary action to protect all refugees on their territory, as well as possible refugees at the border who apply for access to the country. UNHCR publishes a Global Trends Report every year, based on its own data, data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, and data from governments.

23. The role of the UNHCR significantly increased after the start of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Through the UNHCR, 505,385 Ukrainians received protection assistance, advice and referrals at border crossing points, transit and reception centers. Hotlines are used for protection counselling and services, including psychosocial and legal support. 218,469 people received protection information, support or counselling; 147,594 people received information and counselling through hotlines; 61,055 people received legal counselling or assistance; 50,452 people received psychosocial support or aid; 10,358 received social support. This is in addition to 5,362 protection monitoring missions which have been conducted. The UNHCR and partners conducted 64 monitoring visits to border crossing points with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova. In the process, 334 people received protection counselling, 78 received legal assistance, and 9 were supported through social accompaniment.

24. On 17 December 2018, the UN General Assembly affirmed the **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)**, after two years of extensive consultations led by UNHCR with its member states, international organizations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts. Global Compact on Refugees is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, ensuring that sustainable solutions to refugee problems cannot be achieved without international cooperation. Although the GCR is not legally binding, it does represent the political will and ambition of the international community as a whole for strengthened cooperation and solidarity with refugees and affected host countries. The objectives of the GCR are to ease the burden on host countries; improve the ability of refugees to take care of themselves; expand the use of solutions providing access to third countries; promote conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return. The Global Refugee Forum organised in 2019, laid the foundation for the practical implementation of the GCR. States, private sector, international institutions and organizations, the non-governmental organisations, civil society and the refugees themselves discussed burden-sharing mechanisms, as well as the problems in the spheres of education, employment, energy, infrastructure, and social protection.

25. **The Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025)** proposes targeted measures and activities to enhance the capacity of member states to identify and address vulnerabilities throughout asylum and migration procedures. The Action plan is composed of 30 activities in four pillars: three of them based on the core mandate of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy, and the rule of law – and a fourth pillar focusing on cooperation between the migration and asylum authorities in the Member States in order to protect the most vulnerable people. This document provides for the solution of the problems of migrants and asylum seekers in special conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

26. **UNICEF** is actively engaged in regular Government and UN country team coordination mechanisms on the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe. It provides consultation with all relevant governmental structures, as well as UNHCR, respective national branches of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, International Organization on Migration (IOM), and international and national NGOs. As the global humanitarian and development agency for the child rights, UNICEF has taken the lead in mobilizing all relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of the rights of refugee and migrant children and improve assistance to children and their families during their journey, both as part of the immediate humanitarian response and through longer term support to national child protection systems. The UNICEF works with civil society organizations to strengthen governmental systems and capacities and reinforce the linkages between humanitarian action and development programmers. These activities focus on improving reception conditions, protection and access to basic services for affected children.

27. On 24 February, UNICEF-supported mental health and psychosocial support interventions have reached 1,463,018 children and caregivers while 63,950 children and their families have benefited from specialized services through case management and referral to support services. Additionally, 52,446 women and children have so far been reached by UNICEF-supported gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response services. Since 24 February, 272,091 children have benefited from learning interventions with supplies provided by UNICEF and 400,313 children have been engaged in formal or non-formal education. A total of 422,592 individuals, including 261,329 children (of these 26,428 were children with disabilities) have been reached by multi-purpose cash assistance.

28. **International Organization on Migration (IOM)** proactively seeks to reduce exposure to risk and support preparedness efforts to minimize the potential humanitarian and development impacts of the refugee crises. IOM's comprehensive responses are based in sound analysis and built on strong partnerships, to effectively and holistically meet the needs of populations impacted by crisis and fragility. As people of different genders, age, cultural and socio-economic status, they face different risks and are affected differently by crises. IOM ensures that these specificities are taken into account at the various phases of its response. IOM's team initiated the multi-sectoral needs assessment and rehabilitation works in Kyiv, Dnipro and Kharkiv regions.

29. IOM, in coordination with implementing Medical Aid partners provided 1,273 primary health-care consultations and 715 psychological consultations through mobile clinics. Through the Hotline services, 173 consultations, which include psychological first aid, have been provided. IOM has provided general protection assistance to almost 18,698 IDPs and war-affected people in Ukraine since February. Since the beginning of the conflict, the National Toll-Free Counter-Trafficking and Migrant Advice Hotline has provided 92,972 consultations.

30. The **European Union (EU)** supports the Member States in tackling the important challenge of integrating migrants and refugees. The effective integration policies support sound migration management and are also a key feature of the EU social policy. The EU Commission adopted an Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027) in November 2020 following the New Pact, with nearly 60 actions in the fields of education, employment and skills, health and housing. Its implementation is well underway, including publication of a toolkit with practical guidance on inclusion in early childhood education and care. In cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee, the Commission engages in regular consultation and dialogue with civil society organizations at the European Migration Forum. The migration policy of the European Union consists of the principles, norms and methods used by the EU member states in order to regulate migration processes in the EU area. One of the main principles of migration policy is the principle of solidarity, the achievement of which requires

“collective responsibility”. In 2015, the member states of the European Union decided to provide national quotas for refugees in Europe. When resettling refugees in the EU, economic and demographic indicators such as GDP, population, unemployment rate and the number of already considered asylum applications are taken into account. The European Union provides financial support to EU countries that develop and implement adaptation activities.

31. Following the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, the EU has shown unity and supported people in need including direct humanitarian and emergency civilian assistance, border support, and the provision of protection to people fleeing hostilities. On 4 March 2022, the European Union introduced the Temporary Protection Directive, which established the legal framework to regulate the mass arrival of people. In parallel, the European Commission quickly began to coordinate with EU countries to collect information on the situation on the ground and prevent human trafficking. The Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) coordinates the Solidarity Platform for the EU countries, international partners, and EU institutions to ensure the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive. The EU's Migration and Crisis Preparedness Plan collects important information, such as the arrival of refugees, in order to properly stimulate responses to manage migration.

32. In the process of tackling the increased social crisis due to the migration pressure, the BSEC Member States actively cooperate with the abovementioned international organizations, as well as with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

### **The situation in the BSEC countries**

33. The Government of **the Republic of Armenia** has developed a broad social protection response package, which is implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia, through its subordinated agency - the Unified Social Service - and aims to improve the resilience of affected people and reduce the financial burden of host families, with a particular focus on women and vulnerable members of the population. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia coordinates the process of assessing the urgent needs of displaced people and assists them in accordance with the beneficiary needs.

34. Based on the assessed needs, the following works have been carried out: data collection on vacant housing, carried out with the assistance of partners and benefactors of the State Property Management Committee, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth: inventory of available housing belonging to the state and private organizations was prepared; assessment of conditions, calculation of adaptation costs were carried out in order to provide the internally displaced persons (IDPs) with acceptable living conditions; additional living supplies were provided to IDPs such as beds, blankets, bedding, water heaters, heating equipment, etc. with the participation of international and local charities, as well as private organizations. With the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia, 15,000 IDPs were provided with temporary housing.

35. Special attention was paid to groups with special needs - pregnant women, people with mental health problems, wounded servicemen, their family members, creating care and accommodation opportunities for them in Yerevan, where they had access to specialized medical care facilities. They have been provided with special parcels in the form of food and hygienic essential items. Extensive psychological, legal, and social support was provided through state-funded support centres for victims of domestic violence in the regions, as well as to women and their children affected by the war and the post-war situation.

36. In **the Republic of Azerbaijan**, the problem of IDPs was a great burden for the newly independent state. The first steps taken to address the social and other problems faced by



refugees and IDPs are directly related to the name of national leader Heydar Aliyev. President Ilham Aliyev successfully continues the state policy in the field of work with refugees and IDPs. Thanks to the attention and care of the head of state, great work has been done to improve the living conditions of IDPs, 116 new settlements have been built for them, and more than 320,000 IDPs have been relocated to new settlements. Over the past 15 years, the poverty rate among IDPs has been decreased from 75 percent to 8 percent.

37. First Vice-President Mehriban Aliyeva pays special attention to the solution of housing, education and health problems of IDPs, carries out important work in this field, holds meetings with IDP families living in difficult conditions. The country's leadership monitors the work of IDPs on a daily basis. In 2004, Mr. President Ilham Aliyev has launched “State Program on Improving Living Conditions and Increasing Employment of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons”. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed 82 decrees and orders, 235 decisions and orders were issued by the Cabinet of Ministers and the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan has adopted 12 laws.

38. Financial support for the measures taken by President Ilham Aliyev on January 4, 2021, has been directed to restore and rebuild the liberated territories, as well as to transform them into a region with a sustainable economy and high prosperity. The Karabakh Revival Fund has been established to ensure the provision of information and investment, the development of public-private partnerships in this area, as well as to carry out the necessary campaign work inside and outside the country.

39. Internally displaced persons have the opportunity to restore their fundamental rights enshrined in international law, to return to their homeland in a dignified, safe and voluntary manner. The vast majority of them intend to return to their native lands. The work done in this direction in the coming years will be a priority. The State Committee will fulfill all its responsibilities in a timely manner, in accordance with the decrees and orders of the President. Special missions have been established to accelerate the construction, restoration and reconstruction of the liberated territories, to strengthen the coordinated activities of government agencies and other structures to achieve this goal, as well as to increase flexibility and efficiency in governance.

40. **The Republic of Bulgaria** remains on the main route of movement of refugee flows – the Western Balkan, passing from Greece through the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia to Central Europe. According to the official data of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, the number of foreign citizens who had requested protection by 21 December 2021 was 10,633. The migration flow to the Republic of Bulgaria increased significantly in the second half of 2021, but currently there is no refugee crisis.

41. The Bulgarian Parliament has adopted and updated a number of laws that regulate the rights and obligations of foreigners with granted refugee and humanitarian status. The right to asylum in the Republic of Bulgaria is regulated by the Constitution of the country and the Asylum and Refugees Act (ARA). The Constitution defines the powers of the President to grant asylum “to foreigners persecuted for their beliefs or activities in defence of internationally recognized rights and freedoms”.

42. International protection is granted under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, international human rights acts and the Asylum and Refugee Act. International protection confers refugee and humanitarian status, which are granted by a decision of the President of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers (SAR). SAR with the Council of Ministers is a body with special

competences in the field of international protection in the Republic of Bulgaria. In addition, in the performance of the functions within its competence, the SAR with the Council of Ministers also cooperates with the Ministry of Education and Science and its territorial departments, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Labour Offices and the Social Assistance Agency, as well as with the State Agency for Child Protection and the National Legal Aid Bureau.

43. An important condition for successful integration of refugees in the Bulgarian society is the knowledge of Bulgarian language and the realization on the labour market. In this regard, a Programmed for training and employment of persons who have acquired refugee or humanitarian status has been developed. The main objective of the Program is to support refugees and persons with humanitarian status for successful adaptation and labour realization on the Bulgarian labour market through their inclusion in training and subsequent employment, as well as for increasing the capacity of transit and registration reception centres under the Refugees and Asylum Act and local authorities for working with refugees.

44. One of the main priorities of the migration and asylum policy of the **Hellenic Republic** has been to create safe and decent reception conditions for asylum seekers and to proceed with substantial decongestion of the islands taking due consideration of the needs of the local communities. The national reception system includes reception centers and facilities, as well as the "ESTIA - Housing Program for Applicants for International Protection". There are 18.587 third country nationals living in reception centers, as well as apartments, in Greece in August 2022 (56% decrease compared to August 2021), with 3.190 of them residing on the islands (that is, 39% decrease compared to August 2021). The HELIOS Program (Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection) is the main instrument for promoting social integration of refugees in Greece. It is funded by the European Commission, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and its partners, and monitored by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum / Directorate of Social Integration. The Program aims to support the transition of beneficiaries of international protection from the stage of reception to the integration process. By the end of August 2022, it counts 38.795 registered beneficiaries.

45. The Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils (MRICs) were established in 2018 and serve as a counseling body on migration and refugee issues, supporting the integration of third-country nationals in the local community and conducting activities that facilitate civic participation. They MRICs are responsible for: a) identification and examination of the integration issues and problems that refugees and migrants may face in the specific municipality, b) collaboration with public authorities or municipal authorities, c) submission of integration-related proposals to the Municipality Council, d) tackling the problems that migrants and refugees may face especially through counseling services offered in municipalities, e) organization of events in collaboration with the municipality to help raise awareness and enhance social cohesion in local communities.

46. The "National Strategy for the Social Integration of Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection" was issued in November 2021 and was made available for on-line public consultation. The Strategy is based on four main pillars: a) Pre-integration of asylum seekers for the smooth transition of adults to labor market and of minors from non-formal to formal education; b) Social integration of beneficiaries of international protection through the development of intensive education and training programs to facilitate the beneficiaries' access to the labor market; c) Prevention and effective protection against all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse by strengthening reporting mechanisms; and d) Monitoring and supervision of the integration process through commonly accepted and comparable indicators.

47. At the institutional level, the Ministry of Migration & Asylum has undergone a major structural reform introduced by the Presidential Decree 106/2020, in order to ensure streamlining and coherence in exercising its competences that were previously dispersed among several sectors. A Permanent Secretariat has been established in charge of all administrative, financial and IT services, as well as the Coordination Service. The appointment at the beginning of 2021 of a Deputy Minister in charge of integration and unaccompanied minors, indicates the priority accorded to this policy area. The new structure of the Ministry aims to facilitate the achievement of policy objectives, as set within the portfolio of the Ministry, with regards to the: a) design and implementation of national policy on reception, asylum, migration and integration, b) coordination of central and regional services for the efficient and uniform implementation of national and EU policy in the areas of competence of the Ministry and c) active contribution to EU policy making in those areas and to the work of relevant global or regional processes, in cooperation with international organizations and actors.

48. With the development of the asylum system, the **Republic of Moldova** has undertaken a series of commitments in the field of integration of foreigners. With the support of UNHCR and NGOs in the field, projects have been implemented to facilitate the process of integration of refugees into society, such as providing material/financial assistance, employment, business start-up, placement in educational institutions, carrying out cultural events, etc. In the context of the implementation of the National Strategy on migration and asylum, approved by the Government Decision, the Law on the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova was approved on 27 December 2011, adjusted in 2020. The law regulates the process and the ways of facilitating the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova, the coordination role of MIA, the competences of the authorities.

49. The following integration activities are provided in the Republic of Moldova: specialised information sessions, socio-cultural adaptation sessions, state language learning courses, employment measures, information/advice on obtaining Moldovan citizenship. The Law on the integration of foreigners details the realisation of certain rights, such as the right to education, access to healthcare or the social protection system. As regards the beneficiaries of a form of protection, in addition to integration activities, the legal framework offers the possibility to apply for integration programmes. The programme involves the set of measures and activities necessary to facilitate social integration and is implemented through cooperation between central and local public authorities and the non-governmental sector. In the context of the implementation of the Action Plan of the Government for 2021-2022, the drawing up of the Programme on the management of migration flows, asylum and integration of foreigners for 2022-2025 is envisaged. Despite the fact that the Republic of Moldova is not a Member State of the European Union, the domestic legislation in the field of asylum transposed the provisions of the EU Directives on the asylum. The last amendment of the Law no. 270/2008 on the asylum in the Republic of Moldova was operated in 2016.

50. The management of asylum policies is the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs through the Bureau on Migration and Asylum. The Bureau runs the Accommodation Centre for the temporary accommodation of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. The beneficiaries of integration programmes who do not have the means of subsistence may benefit, upon request, of accommodation at the Centre for a period of up to six months, with the possibility of extending it, without exceeding the period for the implementation of the individual integration plan. The reason for extension is the active participation in the implementation of the individual integration plan and the efforts to become an active member of the host society.

51. As of 24 February 2022, in the Republic of Moldova entered more than 600 thousand people from Ukraine, of which over 9000 persons asked for asylum. On 1 September 2022, the asylum system comprised 3876 registered foreigners, of which 3515 asylum seekers, 184 refugees and 177 beneficiaries of humanitarian protection from over 50 countries. The majority are coming from Ukraine, Syria, Turkey, Russian Federation, Vietnam. In 2022, compared to the past years, the number of asylum-seeking requests increased unprecedentedly. With the outburst of the crisis in Ukraine, on 24 February 2022, through Decision 41 of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, a state of emergency was declared on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Hence, a special regime for entering and exiting the country was instituted and special measures were adopted for the protection of refugees, as well as for the protection of the population and institutions of the country. Moldovan authorities allowed full access on the territory of the country, and those who want to request asylum may do it through the existing asylum procedure. Emergency political and legal procedures were adopted to let in all those coming from Ukraine.

52. In **Romania**, the coordination and monitoring of the policy regarding the integration of foreigners belongs to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, through the General Immigration Inspectorate (IGI). According to the Romanian legislation, there are two forms of protection: international protection and temporary protection. The Ministry of the Interior has established the priorities, policies and objectives regarding the effective management of the migration phenomenon, strengthening the national asylum system and ensuring compliance with European and international standards. The National Strategy on Immigration for the period 2021-2024 sets out the principles and guidelines for regulating the national policies regarding the admission, residence, labour immigration, combatting illegal immigration, providing forms of protection to persons in need, and subsequently their integration into Romanian society.

53. The General Inspectorate for Immigration has six Regional Centers for Accommodation and Procedures for Asylum Seekers in: Timisoara, Somcuta Mare – Maramures county, Radauti – Suceava county, Galati, Giurgiu and Bucharest. These centers provide spaces for the accommodation of persons that have requested a form of protection in Romania, in case they do not have the necessary material resources for self-sustain. According to Law no. 122/2006, republished, on asylum in Romania, applicants for protection benefit from the following assistance measures: free accommodation centers; allowance for clothing and other expenses; access to the labor market; free medical care and hospital emergency as well as medical assistance and free treatment in cases of acute or chronic illnesses; cultural adaptation activities; may benefit from counselling and psychological support; minor asylum seekers may benefit from an allowance and can be enrolled in the education system after attending Romanian language courses.

54. The armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine led to a massive influx of Ukrainian citizens on the territory of Romania. Since the beginning of the conflict on 24 February 2022, 4384 asylum applications have been submitted by Ukrainian citizens, out of a total of 10117 asylum applications submitted by 8 September 2022. As of 18 March 2022, the Romanian authorities recognized persons from Ukraine as beneficiaries of temporary protection established by the specific EU Decision, and by 08 September 2022, 64207 residence permits were issued. In 2021, Romania received 9591 asylum applications and most of these were submitted by persons who entered Romania illegally, especially from Serbia. The Government of Romania adopted, in March 2022, support measures for persons fleeing Ukraine, such as: humanitarian assistance; access to the labor market; access to the unemployment insurance system; protection of children, disabled and elderly persons; access for children to mainstream education systems.

55. Ukrainian citizens that legally entered Romania and who did not apply for a form of protection, can be employed without an employment permit and can apply for an extension of their right of residence for work purposes, without the obligation to obtain a long-stay visa for employment. Ukrainian citizens who do not possess documents proving professional qualifications or work experience may be employed on the basis of the self-declaration that they meet the conditions. An integrated platform was launched on March 2022 -"Dopomoha"- for civilians fleeing the war in Ukraine, in order to find relevant information about seeking protection in Romania. Created by Romanian entities in partnership with the UN Refugee Agency and the International Organization for Migration, the platform can be accessed via browser from any device and is available in Romanian, English, Ukrainian and Russian.

56. The issues regarding the legal status of refugees in the **Russian Federation** are regulated by the Federal Law on Refugees of 1993, which establishes the basic procedure for refugee recognition in Russia, guarantees for the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of refugees. Refugee status is not automatically granted. The procedure for recognition as a refugee involves not only application for recognition as a refugee, filling a questionnaire and taking interviews with the questionnaires. Its important elements are verification of the information received about the applicant and his family members arrived together, of the circumstances of their arrival on the territory of Russia and the grounds for being on its territory, examination of the reasons and circumstances included in the application.

57. In practice, foreign citizens and stateless persons in Russia are generally granted temporary asylum. The decision to grant temporary asylum is made by the territorial body of the federal executive body in the field of migration. Temporary asylum may be granted to a foreign citizen or stateless person if they: have grounds for recognition as a refugee but are limited to a written application with a request to be granted the opportunity to temporarily stay on the territory of Russia; have no grounds for recognition as a refugee due to the circumstances prescribed by the law, but for the humanitarian reasons they cannot be deported from the territory of Russia. A person who has received temporary asylum and has passed a mandatory medical examination is issued a certificate.

58. Ensuring the social rights and guarantees of persons recognized as refugees, are same as the rights and guarantees of the Russian citizens, and is the obligation of the Russian Federation, constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and municipalities in accordance with their competences. At present, refugees receive mandatory social insurance benefits and receive social assistance. A refugee and the family members have the right to receive food and use public services in a temporary accommodation centre.

59. Refugees are also entitled to free medical care. According to the Law on Compulsory Medical Insurance in the Russian Federation, insured persons have the right to free assistance to them by medical organizations during the period of guarantee. Refugees are classified as insured persons. As for providing refugees with housing, the Housing Code of the Russian Federation envisages the allocation of specialized housing for temporary accommodation of persons recognized as refugees. A serious problem for refugees was the high rate of income taxation - 30%, similar to that for foreign labour migrants (for Russian citizens - 13%). In order to correct this provision, in October 2014, amendments were introduced to the Tax Code, and the amount of personal income tax for working refugees was reduced from 30% to 13%.

60. In order to respond to the refugee crisis, **the Republic of Serbia** formed a Working Group to solve the problem of mixed migration flows in July 2015. The Working Group has the task of monitoring the situation on the ground, coordinating the competent authorities and proposing measures to the Government in order to solve this problem. The document proposed by the

Working Group to the Government is the Response Plan for the increasing number of migrants on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, which is updated every year in accordance with the current situation. The last plan was updated and adopted by the Government on 23 June 2021. This document defines the main directions of action to resolve the migrant crisis, which include humanitarian response and assistance to vulnerable persons, providing access to asylum to eligible persons, support for the return, protection of the state border and the fight against smuggling. All measures are implemented within the existing legal and institutional framework of the Republic of Serbia.

61. The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, as the body responsible for providing material conditions for the reception of asylum seekers, is also responsible for ensuring the reception of a large number of migrants passing through the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Reception is provided in facilities specially designated for these purposes (12 facilities), asylum centres (7 facilities) and one transit centre. The total accommodation capacity is 6,000 beds, with the possibility of increasing the capacity by an additional 20%.

62. During 2021, the intensive transit of migrants via the Western Balkans route continued. Together with the persons who were accommodated in these facilities at the beginning of the year, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration accommodated 64,303 persons during 2021. This number is similar to the situation in 2020, but it is twice as high as in 2019. In addition to providing basic living conditions (accommodation, sanitation, nutrition and health care) great efforts are being made to provide adequate information on asylum opportunities for those who meet the conditions and to promote assisted voluntary return to countries of origin. The biggest challenges in the acceptance process were reflected in preventing the spread of COVID-19 infection among users, but also managing facilities near northern exit points, which have always suffered much higher pressure than centres at entry points into the country.

63. In accordance with the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection and the regulations governing access to integration assistance, the Commissariat is continuously working on their implementation. The assistance consists of financial support for housing, provision of Serbian language classes, introduction to Serbian history, tradition and social organization, legal assistance, assistance in joining the school system, employment. An individual integration plan is prepared for each person, based on when the agreed support measures are provided. All persons who applied for inclusion in the integration support programme receive appropriate assistance. From January to December 2021, 22 people attended Serbian language classes. The Commissariat, the National Employment Service and the UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on the employment of persons granted protection.

64. The crisis arising from the conflicts in Ukraine has directly affected **the Republic of Türkiye** in terms of regular immigration patterns. Accordingly, foreigners of Ukrainian nationality whose passport validity periods are insufficient can enter the country within the scope of visa exemption by using their existing passports, without being subjected to the 60-day period from the expiry of the visa, visa exemption or residence permit. In addition, as of 24 February 2022, a residence permit has been issued to more than 20 thousand foreigners of Ukrainian nationality who have entered the country legally and fulfilled the conditions, and these foreigners have been exempted from the restriction of short-term residence permit given for tourism purposes. There are currently 5,343,291 foreigners in the Republic of Türkiye. Of these foreigners, 1,364,723 have residence permits, 321,270 are under international protection, and 3,657,298 are under temporary protection.

65. While the Migration Board, which is convened centrally under the chairmanship of the Minister of Interior, ensures the coordination and cooperation between all institutions and

organizations working in the migration sector; “Provincial and District Migration Coordination Board” meetings are held in the provinces under the chairmanship of our Governors with the participation of all relevant institutions (including universities, NGOs and municipalities) in order to address thematic issues such as health, education, employment and social life, and “Local Integration Action Plans” are prepared by these boards, also taking into account the sensitivities of the citizens. In addition, within the framework of the activities and services provided by the Presidency of Migration Management and the principles and objectives of the migration policy, digital information platforms are put into service in order to increase the level of knowledge and awareness of foreigners, relevant stakeholders and the public on migration, foreigners and international protection, and to facilitate the social adaptation of foreigners by informing them accurately, effectively and timely about their access to rights and services.

66. “Social Cohesion and Life Education Program (SUYE)” was launched in Public Education Centers and schools with a flexible model addressing issues such as “Türkiye’s Cultural Structure, Traditions and Customs, General Ethics and Social Life Rules, Social Life Rules, Rights and Obligations, Information on Social Life, Education and Health Opportunities, Legal Issues and Access to Livelihoods”, in order to facilitate the adaptation of all adult (17-65 years old) foreigners who have the legal right to stay in the country, especially Syrians, to social, economic and cultural life during their stay. 1,149,564 people have been trained to date within the scope of SUYE, which was launched in 2019. It is aimed to reach 1 million 600 thousand individuals by the end of 2022. YİMER 157, which is a call center where foreigners can find answers to all their questions about issues such as visa, residence permit, international protection, and temporary protection, continues to provide guidance in Turkish, English, Arabic, Persian, Russian, German and Pashto languages 24/7. To date, the number of calls received by YİMER 157 is 14,754,619, and the number of lives saved as a result of 679 notifications made to YİMER 157 is 14,675.

67. “Immigration Counseling Centers” have been established in 15 provinces where foreigners reside heavily in order to provide information and guidance services needed by foreigners regarding their access to rights and services in the most effective way through face-to-face and two-way communication. A total of 2,727,815 clients have been served in these centers since 2018. The “Guide to Living in Türkiye”, which provides information to foreigners on all aspects of life in Turkey (jobs, education, health, legal and justice system, cultural structure, transportation, accommodation, banking services, social life, etc.), has been prepared in 7 languages. In addition, the Migration Mobile application, which includes information life in Türkiye and Turkish culture and history, and features services for foreigners, frequently asked questions, and voice translation services, can be downloaded free of charge from the Google Play Store and Apple Store.

68. The Russian military aggression against Ukraine caused the fastest increase in the flow of refugees since the World War II. 29% of Ukraine's population (12.8 million people) were relocated within the country or abroad. Majority of people left Ukraine in the period of 27 February – 9 March. During this period, 1,649,088 people departed crossing the border of Ukraine. More than 150,000 people were leaving the country every day. The peak of the border crossing in one day was on 6 March when 210,526 people crossed the border. Altogether, 1.4 million (18.8%) people left Ukraine, almost every fifth is a child. Since 17 March the number of people leaving the country has been gradually decreasing, which indicates the reduction of first refugee wave. Thus, as of 30 May, 6,801,987 Ukrainian refugees, mostly women and children, searched for protection and support in neighbouring countries. The number of refugees according to government data as of May 2022 is as follows: Poland - 3,627,178; Romania - 989 357; Russian Federation - 971,417; Hungary - 682 594; Moldova - 479 513;

Slovakia - 461,164; Belarus - 30,092. At the same time, 2,048,500 Ukrainians have returned to their homes after 28 February.

69. As of 30 May, the UNHCR reported 2,229,500 returns to Ukraine. But it should be noted that this figure reflects cross-border movements, which can be temporary and not necessarily showing the sustainable return since the situation in Ukraine remains instable and unpredictable. According to UN forecasts, migration back to Ukraine will increase, but it is not a good idea from a security point of view. According to the UN representatives, the mass return exacerbates humanitarian problems within Ukraine. This will inevitably create new challenges for the humanitarian response to the crisis as people need support to reintegrate into the communities or find appropriate host communities if returning to their homes is not possible or feasible.

70. The topicality of the issue of the special legal status and regime for citizens of Ukraine who left the country is due to a number of problems, as well as the need to address the vital social aspects of their status/regime, namely: temporary accommodation, education, employment, medical care, the right to freedom of movement, etc. The main mechanisms of legal protection for citizens of Ukraine who were forced to move abroad due to the military aggression of the Russian Federation include: temporary protection and refugee/subsidiary protection status.

71. The government of Ukraine began to respond to the unprecedented outflow of people almost immediately after it started. By the Resolution No. 425 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 9 April 2022 a working group (WG) was established to protect the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens located on the territory of the EU member states and other states as temporarily displaced persons. The main tasks of the WG are: to ensure the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens who are on the territory of the EU member states and other states as temporarily displaced persons, and to create necessary conditions for their return to the territory of Ukraine as soon as possible; to determine the ways and means of solving problematic issues of protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens of Ukraine who are on the territory of the EU member states and other states as temporarily displaced persons; to improve the legal framework for ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens of Ukraine who are on the territory of EU member states and other states as temporarily displaced persons.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

72. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, migration processes have acquired an unprecedented scale and became multilateral and global in nature. The increased flow of refugees has become a critical issue that is assuming great significance in the foreign and domestic policies of countries. The countries were not prepared for the migration crisis. Against the backdrop of the migration crisis, internal and external contradictions between countries have become even more noticeable. The topic of migration and the problems of its regulation have become the cause of hot political discussions within the European Union. Migration is largely linked to broader global economic, social, political and technological transformations that affect a wide range of high-priority policy issues.

73. The BSEC Region gets under negative influence of the growing refugees flows and the refugee crisis provides new challenges. The countries that harbour refugees face many difficulties, including the pressing economic challenges associated with the accommodation of refugees and their integration into their new places of residence. In addition, the increasing flow of refugees gives rise to social and economic tensions within the region. The national migration policies are being updated according to the latest developments, including measures to promote economic and social adaptation and integration of migrants.



74. Today, the Wider Black Sea Region faces the threat of increased military-political tension in different domains, which implies the inevitable suffering for the people living in the region. There is no doubt that the prevailing unstable political climate, unresolved and protracted conflicts, long-standing disputes over borders and security concerns undermine the normal course of economic activity and deprive the regions of the opportunity to enjoy the results of the economic cooperation process to the fullest. Even countries not directly involved in conflicts suffer the economic, social, and political consequences of overall instability in the region. However, addressing the range of regional problems is closely linked to the efforts to establish lasting peace and stability in the region through political means that counteract the concept of using power that leads to political impasse. The Russian military aggression against Ukraine may result in humanitarian suffering on a scale beyond what Europe has seen this century. Millions of people in Ukraine have been uprooted from their homes, among them over 5.5 million who have fled to neighbouring countries. The majority of those on the move are women and children, who are always at risk of exploitation and abuse during crises.

75. Most of the BSEC countries have developed action plans and effective integration programs that include a range of activities necessary to promote social inclusion and are implemented through cooperation between central and local government authorities and the non-governmental sector. Social services meet the social needs of an individual and family in order to overcome difficult conditions, as well as to prevent social marginalization and exclusion. Measures taken include providing a specialized database of employers offering jobs to beneficiaries of international protection, information on job vacancies; programs and activities to preserve jobs and encourage employment; provision of intermediary services in the field of employment; the provision of psychological assistance, the organization of vocational guidance, the inclusion of mechanisms and programs for employment and vocational training in the adult education system.

76. The refugee problem continues to be a challenge for the international community. While states hosting refugees must continue to fulfil their obligations to ensure their protection and promote an environment of tolerance towards members of other peoples, states of origin of refugees must prevent actions that give rise to mass movement of their populations. It is important to find ways to resolve the social issues concerning the refugee problem in the framework of the current Russian military aggression against Ukraine in order to ensure sustainable long-term solutions.

77. The regional cooperation and building the capacity of the states in the region to deal effectively with the refugee issues remains a priority. The governmental agencies and non-government organizations are called upon to provide a solution to the numerous aspects of refugee problems, and to mobilize all available resources that are required for imperative decision-making. Equally important would be the joint representation of the interests of the countries affected by the crisis and the insistence on respecting the principles of solidarity and burden-sharing. The most effective way to respond to emergencies will always be a coordinated and system-wide approach.

78. State leaders at the regional and global levels must redouble their efforts to promote peace, stability and cooperation in order to halt and reverse the relocation of people caused by violence. The world needs greater political will to resolve conflicts and end the persecution that is forcing people to flee and end up in unfavourable conditions. Therefore, the world community must determine the most effective ways to prevent new flows of refugees.