



**THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF MALTA TO THE UN GENEVA**

Statement by H.E. Christopher Grima, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malta to the UN Office and other International Organisations in Geneva for the 86th Session of the UNHCR Standing Committee.

Agenda Item 3a) ii. Regional Updates: Europe

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Thank you Chair.

Malta aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and would like to make these additional remarks in its national capacity.

Malta thanks UNHCR for its valuable work through its operations in Europe.

At the outset we offer our deepest condolences to the people of Türkiye and Syria and to UNHCR following the devastating earthquake that has also taken the lives of UNHCR personnel on the ground.

Chairperson,

Since we last met a year ago, the European region has experienced a number of unprecedented events, including on matters relating to refugees, notably through a trifactor of situations – the enduring central Mediterranean route, an increase of migrant arrivals from Asia, and the devastating consequences of Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine.

Chairperson,

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has forced millions, mostly women and children, to flee their country. In a visible demonstration of solidarity, the EU renewed activation of the Temporary Protection Directive mechanisms to effectively address these challenges. Since 24 February 2022, Malta has received more than 1,400 applications for temporary protection through this mechanism despite not being a neighbouring state.

As the conflict enters its second year, we commend the work carried out by UNHCR and its partners, both in Ukraine and in neighbouring states. We reiterate the Maltese Government’s readiness to support those fleeing the violence of this unprovoked and unjust war of aggression and to work on both short- and long-term durable solutions together.

Chairperson,

While migrant and asylum-seeker arrivals at specific locations can fluctuate periodically, the Central Mediterranean route has seen a net increase for the third year in a row. We need not reiterate the obvious risk to life and limb migrants face during their attempts to cross the treacherous sea. Those who reach our shores customarily apply for asylum.



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Malta remains fully committed to respect its obligations under international law and the human rights of all people in the territory under its jurisdiction. No cases of vessels carrying migrants and asylum-seekers which signalled distress within Malta's SAR area have been ignored by the Maltese authorities. Asylum-seekers, refugees and those granted international protection, within Malta's territorial jurisdiction have always enjoyed access to essential services including healthcare. These services have been bolstered in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that every person's human rights are respected.

Chairperson,

UNHCR's continued work and assistance to advance community-based approaches to protection through its office in Malta is commendable. While female genital mutilation is not and has never been a social practice in Malta, over the past years there have been instances of FGM among specific migrant groups. As noted in this year's report, UNHCR has included community mobilisation programs against female genital mutilation in Malta this past year. The Maltese authorities remain steadfast in their commitment to eradicate this practice to meet the Sustainable Development Goals target 5.3 deadline of Zero FGM by 2030 and the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy, and have taken steps, including by amending the criminal code, to combat this harmful practice in all instances. We therefore welcome the UNHCR's support in this regard and its employment of community-based and whole-of-society approach as well.

Malta also reiterates its readiness to support UNHCR and its commitment to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), especially in the current context. In this regard we look also forward to the second Global Refugee Forum to be held later this year. We also thank UNHCR for its continued invaluable assistance and cooperation in all areas within its remit and hope that this can be further strengthened going forward.

We highly appreciate UNHCR's work globally in humanitarian action, and we particularly thank UNHCR personnel in field missions for their work in often challenging circumstances.

Chairperson,

Tomorrow, we celebrate International Women's Day. Allow me to acknowledge and pay tribute to the excellent work done by UNHCR's women personnel all over the world. Their work is a tangible demonstration of why the inclusion of women in all aspects of society is vital.

I Thank you.