



UNHCR Statement on the European Union Strategic Guidelines to be defined by the European Council on 26-27 June 2014

On 26 – 27 June 2014, the European Council will adopt the Strategic Guidelines for legislative and operational planning for the coming years within the area of freedom, security and justice.

UNHCR urges European leaders in all Member States to adopt Guidelines which ensure the dignified treatment of and respect for fundamental rights of all persons seeking protection within the Union in full compliance with international standards, in particular the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the recently adopted European asylum acquis.

The events unfolding in the nearby neighbourhoods of Syria and North Africa and further afield in Iraq, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Eritrea, to name a few, are reminders that the need of refugees for international protection are as dire as ever. Large-scale outflows of refugees place an enormous burden on countries in the region where they occur, and the need for solidarity by EU Member States with these countries, as well as for coherent and holistic strategies between the internal and external dimensions of the Union, must guide future directions in this area.

The challenges facing many Member States in dealing with mixed flows of persons in need of protection and irregular migrants, often taking desperate measures leading to loss of life, places particular pressures on Member States at the external borders of the Union. The Strategic Guidelines should emphasise the commitment to ensure full respect for access to protection as an integral part of modern border management and border control. Innovative approaches to ensure adequate reception facilities for those arriving and access to fair and efficient asylum procedures for those in need of international protection are also required.

UNHCR recalls that the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) requires the Union to adopt measures on asylum providing *inter alia* for a uniform status of asylum valid throughout the Union, a uniform status of subsidiary protection, and common procedures for the granting and withdrawing of those statuses. The Strategic Guidelines could provide a road-map for how this can be truly achieved by placing more emphasis on ways to share responsibility, such as mutual recognition of asylum decisions.

UNHCR also urges Member States to include the creation of credible alternative legal avenues to access protection in Europe in the Guidelines. An ambitious resettlement target should be set, and mechanisms for improving cooperation to expedite family reunification for beneficiaries of international protection should be envisaged. More engagement with civil society, local actors and private entities should be supported to develop or enhance other approaches for legal entry.

The urgency of leadership, including from European countries, for the eradication of statelessness by 2024 is needed. This is an achievable goal in the EU, and a matter of justice and human security. The Strategic Guidelines offer an opportunity to set the course for how Member States can work with the European institutions and UNHCR to achieve this goal.

24 June 2014