

EUROPE MONTHLY REPORT



Syrian refugee Lorca Fakir stands in front of a statue in her new hometown, Dunshaughlin, Ireland. This rural town is piloting the first citizen-led resettlement programme. Unlike traditional refugee resettlement models where the state provides settlement and integration services, this scheme involves private citizens supporting displaced people with financial, emotional and practical help in the community.

TRENDS AND KEY FIGURES

In March, just over 4,500 refugees and migrants entered Europe, primarily via Italy, Greece and Spain. Overall arrivals to Spain decreased by just over 26% compared with the previous month (1,006 versus 1,366) while arrivals through routes to Greece (3,159 versus 2,316) and Italy (262 versus 60) increase compared with the previous month. So far this year some 15,900 refugees and migrants arrived to Europe via the three Mediterranean routes compared to over 19,200 that arrived in the same period last year, marking a 17% decrease.

ITALY: the number of arrivals by sea in March (262), while still very low in comparison to the same period last year (3,963), is the highest number of arrivals by sea via the Central Mediterranean route so far in 2019. As of 31 March, over 520 refugees and migrants reached Italy by sea, a 92% decrease compared to sea arrivals in the same period last year. Of those crossing the sea in March, 39% departed from Tunisia, 34% departed from Libya, 14% departed from Greece, and 13% departed from Algeria. The primary nationalities that have arrived by sea in 2019 so far are Tunisians (28%), Algerians (16%) and Iraqi (13%).

GREECE: in March, almost 3,160 refugees and migrants arrived by sea (60%) and land (40%) to Greece compared to over 3,940 whom arrived in the same period in 2018 (a 20% decrease). They mainly

Mediterranean
15,900
arrivals in 2019 ¹

350
estimated dead/missing in 2019 ¹

Greece²
8,127

2,652	2,316	3,159
Jan	Feb	Mar

Italy
524

202	60	262
Jan	Feb	Mar

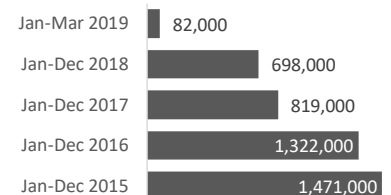
Spain²
6,984

4,612	1,366	1,006
Jan	Feb	Mar

Cyprus
124

85	39	0
Jan	Feb	Mar

New asylum applications in Europe ³



¹ data.unhcr.org/mediterranean as of 31 March 2019.

² Greece and Spain both include sea and land arrivals; Spain includes sea arrivals in the Mediterranean and to the Canary Islands; Total arrivals also includes Malta.

³ Sources: Eurostats for EU+ countries (Only partial data for January to March 2019. All data is provisional and last updated 09 April 2019); UNHCR for Eastern Europe (as of 30 June 2018), Turkey (as of 30 September 2018) and South Eastern Europe (as of 31 March 2019).

34,705

Relocated in total ⁴
⁴Source: [European Commission](#), as of 30 October 2018.

 from **Greece**

21,999

(33% of 66,400)

 from **Italy**

12,706

(32% of 39,600)

1,843

Returns EU-Turkey statement ¹²
¹²Source: [Ministry of Citizen Protection](#), Greece as of 31 March 2019.

originated from Afghanistan (32%), Iraq (12%) and the Syrian Arab Republic (11%). As of the end of March, the nearly 8,130 arrivals to Greece are consistent with the same period last year (7,908). In addition, the number of persons rescued or intercepted by the Turkish Coast Guards after departing from the Turkish coastline is 4,316 since the beginning of the year, consistent with the same period in 2018 (4,214 individuals). At the land border, 1,255 people arrived to Evros in March, an increase from the previous two months (801 and 830) and similar to the 1,500 arrivals of the same period in 2018.

SPAIN: over 1,000 people crossed the land (42%) and sea (58%) borders from North Africa in March, a decrease of 23% compared to March 2018 (1,300), when 415 crossed the land borders. So far this year, over 6,980 people have arrived to Spain a 40% increase compared to the same period in 2018 (5,000). Their primary countries of origin are Guinea, Morocco, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire.

WESTERN BALKANS: Movements through the region continued with some 1,720 new arrivals recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina in March. Some 5,500 were believed to be in Bosnia and Herzegovina as of the end of March along with some 4,420 in Serbia.

DEAD AND MISSING: As of 31 March, over 350 people have died or gone missing while trying to reach Europe by sea which is a 30% decrease compared to the number of deaths between January and March in 2018 (500). In addition, 14 refugees or migrants have died along land routes in Europe or at Europe's borders. In March 119 lives were lost in

several incidents at sea. Two four-year old boys and their father lost their lives in a shipwreck near Samos of a boat that carried twelve people from Afghanistan. The mother of the family was amongst the eight survivors. On 14 March, a boat carrying 67 refugees and migrants sank while attempting to cross the Western Mediterranean from Morocco to Spain: the Moroccan Navy rescued 22 persons, including seven pregnant women, while 45 persons were reported missing. Also, on 23 March, 41 refugees and migrants were reported missing while crossing to Europe through the Central Mediterranean.



Piles of lifejackets used by refugees and migrants to cross the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece are seen at a dumping ground near the town of Molyvos on the Greek island of Lesbos.

OTHER SITUATIONS IN EUROPE

Turkey **4.0 million**

Refugees and asylum seekers ⁵

 Syrian Arab Republic **3,651,000**

 Afghanistan **172,000**

 Iraq **143,000**

 Other nationalities **57,000**
⁵ Source: UNHCR as of 31 March 2019

Ukraine **1.6 million**

Internally Displaced Persons ⁶ and **Conflict Affected Persons** ⁷

 Refugees: ⁸ **2,620**

 Asylum seekers: ⁹ **6,388**

 Stateless persons: ¹⁰ **35,650**
⁶ Residing more permanently in government-controlled areas (GCA).

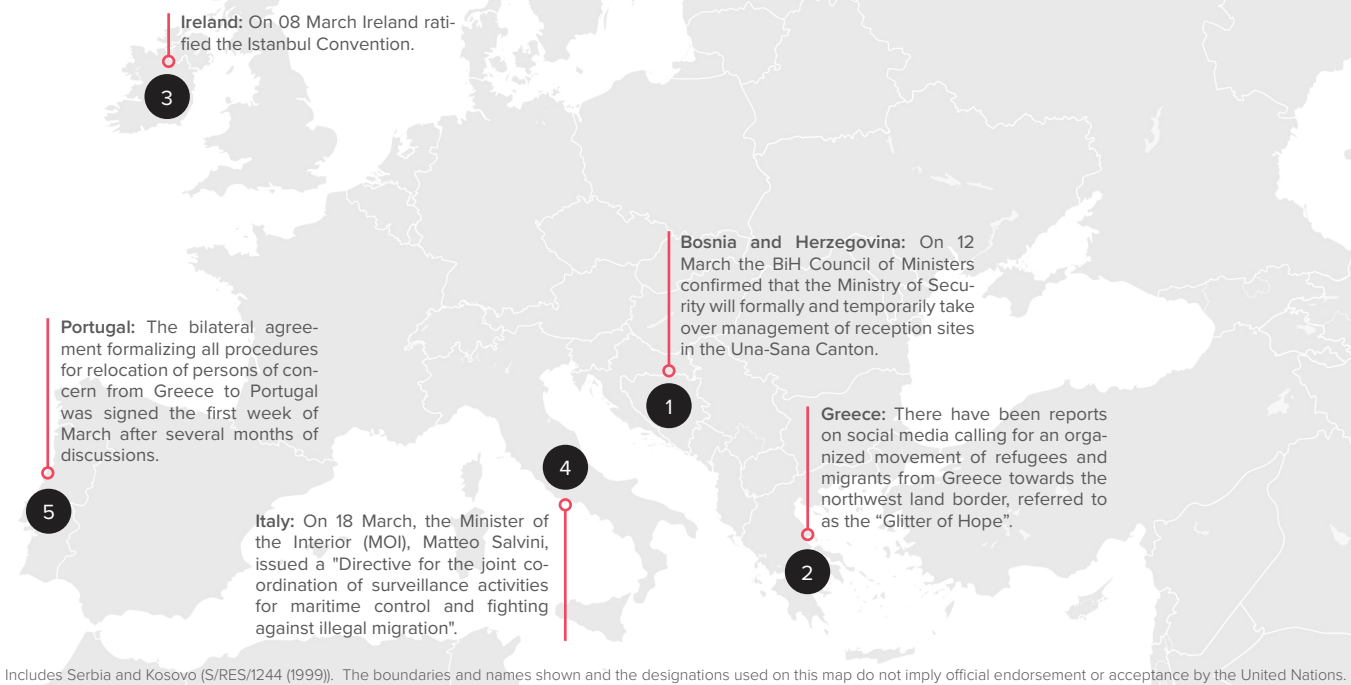
⁷ Estimated number of conflict-affected people living along the line of contact in government-controlled areas (GCA) and non-government controlled areas (NGCA).

⁸ UNHCR, State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 31/12/2018

⁹ UNHCR as of 31/03/2019

¹⁰ State Migration Service of Ukraine as of 01/01/2019

KEY DEVELOPMENTS



AUSTRIA: On 13 March, the new law on social aid passed the Ministerial Council and will soon be presented to Parliament. UNHCR’s [concerns](#) on the law providing limited access for refugees until they reach the language level B1 (early intermediate) and totally barring subsidiary protection holders from social aid were not addressed during and after the consultation period. UNHCR reiterated its concerns in a short media statement, calling upon Parliamentarians to reconsider respective points of the draft law.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: A major turning point was **1** the [decision](#) on 12 March by the Bosnian and Herzegovina (BiH) Council of Ministers that the Ministry of Security, which is responsible for the migrant/refugee situation, formally and temporarily take over management of reception sites in the Una-Sana Canton from IOM. This will formalize those sites as addresses of residence, which is a precondition for an effective lodging, and processing, of asylum applications.

CROATIA: On 12 March, Amnesty International issued a [report](#) calling on the EU to prevent “systematic, unlawful and frequently violent pushbacks” of asylum-seekers by Croatian police at the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The AI report confirmed that UNHCR systematically voiced concerns about the situation, including in the UNHCR’s Desperate Journeys annual report for 2019, according to which there were consistent reports relating to thousands of people who had been pushed back to a neighbouring country by police and other authorities of several countries in the region. The Croatian Ministry of Interior has denied any wrongdoings and has reiterated their strict application of EU

and national legislation to protect people.

DENMARK: On 21 March, UNHCR [contributed](#) to an online debate on the well-known media platform Altinget.dk with the topic “Can Syrian refugees be returned”, arguing in an op-ed signed by Representative Henrik Nordentoft, that the conditions for dignified and safe return are not yet present in Syria. The op-ed underlined that Syrian refugees are still in need of international protection, that UNHCR needs to be given access on the ground to assess conditions, and pointed to the fact that many Syrian refugees are hoping to return some day but are currently concerned about a number of factors. Other voices in the debate have argued the same, including by referring to UNHCR’s position. UNHCR will contribute a second op-ed to the debate in April.

EU related developments: The Frontex JO Themis was extended until 31 January 2020 with a stronger focus on surveillance and substantial reductions in its scope as compared to previous years. The most relevant of these is the limited presence at sea, with almost no vessels deployed, which responds to the current policy of Italy and the EU affecting also EUNAVFOR Sophia Operation.

The Frontex Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights, chaired by UNHCR and the Jesuit Refugee Service, [published](#) its sixth annual report outlining its activities in 2018 on 01 March. Political agreement has also been reached on the adoption of a new Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex) to be adopted in April 2019.

FRANCE: UNHCR’s Director of External Relations, Dominique Hyde, met with key stakeholders in Paris on 29 March.

During her visit, Ms. Hyde had discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Development Agency to further strengthen cooperation, also in preparation of the [Global Refugee Forum](#), as well as with the ICC (International Chamber of Commerce). UNHCR France team seized the opportunity to present her the project of the Hospitality train which would travel across France and to Geneva in sync with the launch of the GRF. Earlier in the month, Julien Boucher, State Counsellor and currently Director of Legal Affairs at the Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition, has been nominated on the 9 March by the President Emmanuel Macron as the New Executive Director at the head of the French asylum office (OFPRA). Before taking up his new position, his nomination will have to be formally approved by the law commissions of the National Assembly and the Senate.

GERMANY: Following the investigation in 2018 of the Bremen branch office of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), an official reply was presented on 11 March 2019. The German government conceded that the alleged scandal with regard to purportedly 1,200 asylum decisions falsified by the former head of BAMF turned out to be much smaller than expected. After 13,000 positive asylum decisions were re-examined, only 28 turned out to be flawed and had to be withdrawn.

GREECE: There have been reports on social media calling ² for an organized movement of refugees and migrants from Greece towards the northwest land border, referred to as the “Glitter of Hope”, claiming that borders will be open and that humanitarian organizations would assist this movement. To address false information that has been circulating on social media, UNHCR and IOM issued a [joint statement](#) which was shared with actors managing sites, hotels and apartments, accommodating refugees and asylum-seekers, in the mainland and the islands warning people of false information and strongly advising against such movements that may harbour risks for people and their families. The message is also shared through the [HELP website](#), and [refugee.info](#).

On 13 March, the Ministry for Migration Policy issued a [press release](#) informing that access to necessary administrative procedures (issuance of social security number, opening of a bank account, registration with tax authorities and unemployment services and access to the Social Solidarity Income) was ensured in priority for the individuals who received international protection in Greece prior to July 2017, and were expected to depart from the ESTIA programme by the 1 of April 2019. UNHCR and its partners are helping as a priority ‘exit’ cases to complete the pending procedures and monitoring access to those key services. UNHCR also welcomed the modalities announced by the Ministry to strengthen refugee integration in a [press release](#). UNHCR continues to support the authorities accelerate the implementation of measures. The Ministerial Decision for the regulation of the ESTIA cash and accommodation programme in 2019 was published in the Government Gazette on 12 March. The decision regulates eligibility criteria for entry, the duration of stay, cessation of eligibility, withdrawal/reduction of assistance for both cash and accommodation from 1 January 2019 – 31 December 2019.

The situation in Vathy’s Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) on Samos remain dire, where 3,500 people live in a space designed for 700. RIC conditions are extremely poor in terms of hygiene as a result of overcrowding. Many people live in makeshift shelter in the fields next to the centre, with no access to toilets and showers or lighting, which increase alarming protection risks. The difficult conditions fuel also tension with the local community. This month, the parents of elementary school children in Vathy kept their children from school for two weeks in protest to refugee children attending afternoon classes in the same premises. Minister of Migration Policy Vitsas addressed a letter to the parents’ association, while the Education Deputy Minister condemned publicly the event, emphasizing the right of all to education. Children returned to school, but more urgent measures are needed to improve conditions in Samos’ Vathy RIC.

IRELAND: On 08 March [Ireland ratified the Istanbul Convention](#) ³ as it requires gender-based violence to be recognized as a form of persecution when establishing refugee status. UNHCR referenced the Istanbul Convention requirements in our submission to the consultation process on Ireland’s Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) with respect to domestic implementation and the protection system in Ireland. The Convention will enter into force, as regards Ireland, on the 1 July 2019.

UNHCR is [pleased](#) to welcome the introduction of a Community Sponsorship Programme in Ireland. The programme, which will give communities the opportunity to provide sanctuary to people fleeing war and persecution, will strengthen Ireland’s response to the global refugee crisis. “The new Irish community sponsorship programme presents a unique opportunity to assist refugees to become full and active members of Irish society” said Enda O’Neill, Head of Office, UNHCR Ireland. “It will allow community groups to support people upon arrival in Ireland and help them develop language skills, access and navigate public services and learn about Ireland, its history and culture.”

ITALY: On 18 March, the Minister of the Interior (MOI), Matteo Salvini, issued a “[Directive for the joint coordination of surveillance activities for maritime control and fighting against illegal migration](#)” ⁴. The Directive is addressed at law enforcement agencies operating at sea. It outlines that, where a vessel undertakes search and rescue (SAR) operations in the non-Italian SAR-zone without the coordination of the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), Italy would bear no responsibility for disembarkation. It also outlines that, in such circumstances, entry on Italian territory, including territorial waters, is to be deemed illegal and is thus to be prevented. The Directive was issued on the same day as the Italian NGO vessel Mare Jonio rescued 50 refugees and migrants in distress off the Libyan coast. Rescued individuals eventually disembarked in Lampedusa on 19 March, but the vessel was seized and authorities launched an investigation against members of the crew for the alleged abetting of illegal immigration. UNHCR delivered information to new arrivals regarding asylum procedures in Italy.

On 28 March, following the [letter sent by the European](#)

[Commission's](#) Director General for Migration and Internal Affairs, Ms. Michou, to the Executive Director of the EBCGA, Mr. Leggeri, Minister of the Interior Salvini issued a second note in which he recalls the role of the Libyan authorities in the Libyan SAR zone, and calls on Italian authorities to cooperate to ensure that Libyan authorities can carry out SAR procedures and strengthen their role further. In various press responses, the European Commission, UNHCR and IOM highlighted that Libya is not a safe place for disembarkation.

Furthermore, UNHCR [believes](#) it urgent for States to take action to reassert effective rescue capacity on the Mediterranean by increasing coordinated multi-state rescue, restoring rapid disembarkation in a place of safety, and lifting impediments to the work of NGO rescue vessels.

On 29 March, the Women's Refugee Commission released the "[More than One Million Pains](#)" report, focusing on Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy. UNHCR welcomed the WRC report given the challenges in identifying and supporting male survivors of SGBV. UNHCR contributed to the report and strongly supported this initiative as this is an issue of deep concern to the office. UNHCR advocates for all survivors of sexual violence, including men and boys, to have access to medical and psychosocial support. It is important to ensure that such services are available, accessible and appropriate for men and boys as well.

MALTA: A Palau-registered tanker, the Elhibu I, rescued 108 refugees and migrants, including small children with protection needs, off the coast of Libya on 27 March. The vessel's captain was asked to assist those in distress as the Libyan Coast Guard was unable to assist in the circumstances. Reportedly, after the rescue, and out of fear of being brought back to Tripoli, Libya, a group of those rescued on board the Elhibu I allegedly took control of the vessel six miles away from the Libyan coast and requested it to be re-routed away from Libya and towards Malta. In the evening of 27 March, the Maltese armed forces boarded the commercial vessel some 30 nautical miles off Malta. A Maltese special operations unit team was dispatched on board and secured the vessel, returning control of the ship to the captain. The Elhibu I eventually docked in Malta on 28 March.

PORTUGAL: The bilateral agreement formalizing all procedures for relocation of persons of concern from Greece to Portugal was signed the first week of March after several months of discussions between the Foreigners and Borders Service of Portugal (SEF) and the Greek Asylum Service. The document provides for a first SEF selection mission to identify 100 beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers who are in refugee camps in Greece and who wish to be transferred to Portugal. Up to 1,000 persons could be transferred under this agreement, including 80 per cent beneficiaries of international protection and 20 per cent asylum-seekers. Timelines and nationalities are not yet defined. AMIF funds of 6,000 euros per person will be used. IOM will support the process. On 8 March, the Portuguese Ministry of Internal Administration issued a [press release](#) on the agreement.

SPAIN: The Spanish asylum NGO ACCEM published a [study](#) on the situation of LGBTI asylum applicants in Spain. This

study, the most complete and up to date, has highlighted a number of issues related to the reception system and the asylum procedure.

SWITZERLAND: An extended reform of the Swiss asylum procedure entered into force on 1 March after being tested in pilot centres in Zürich and Boudry. Main changes include: creation of six federal reception centre regions where asylum-seekers are hosted (up to 140 days) and where decision-making takes place; triage after first interview between cases which will be decided in an accelerated procedure, and complex cases which are referred to an extended procedure and the introduction of free counselling and legal representation. While welcoming the reform, UNHCR also drew attention to challenges such as the independence and quality of legal aid, the short deadlines for appeals, and the need to ensure uniformity of decisions among the six regions.

UKRAINE: UNHCR and its partner Proliska completed two peaceful coexistence projects (PCP) in Luhansk GCA (close proximity to the 'contact line'): a first-aid center in Sotenne village that will serve IDPs and conflict-affected residents as well as a leisure/educational center in Pshenychne village that will be used by both local and neighbouring residents of the nearby settlements. The projects were implemented by the support of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the US Department of State.

The Protection Cluster, led by UNHCR, issued its [monthly factsheet](#), highlighting key protection concerns and response activities by protection partners. Due to an escalation of hostilities, OHCHR recorded a 300% increase in civilian casualties compared to the previous month (from 4 casualties in January to 12 in February), with mine and ERW-related incidents accounting for 50% of casualties. At least 86 private houses were damaged due to shelling in GCA and NGCA. Freedom of movement remains a key protection concerns for the conflict-affected population, with 16 people having died while crossing checkpoints in 2019, with the majority being older people.

UNHCR provided the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (SBGS) with 150 body cameras and three laptops made possible by the support of the European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). The devices will be used at the five entry-exit checkpoints (EECP) along the 'contact line' in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where thousands of people commute daily between government-controlled area (GCA) and non-government controlled area (NGCA).

In preparation of the national presidential elections on 31 March and 21 April 2019, the Protection Cluster issued an [Advocacy Note on Voting Rights of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine](#). The Protection Cluster recommends the Parliament of Ukraine to pass the Draft Law No. 6240 on the electoral rights of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and internal migrants in order to remove the existing legal and practical barriers for IDPs' full participation in all elections, including at local level, in line with international standards.

EVENTS IN MARCH

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was commemorated on 21 March. At the event, Michael O’Flaherty, Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Jean-Paul Lehners, Chair of the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) affirmed their commitments to counter labour market discrimination of people with an ethnic or migrant background. Building on the 2017 [‘Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey’](#), they called for enforcing international and national anti-discrimination legislation, including tougher sanctions, and amendments to working practices to promote the diversity Europe needs to remain relevant in today’s global economy. ODIHR Director pointed in particular at discrimination of Roma and Sinti, the largest ethnic minority in Europe.

Integration (Welcome project) - On 21 March, the High Commissioner attended the awarding ceremony of the [Welcome – Working for Refugee Integration](#) project in Milan. Seventy-five companies were awarded the project logo in recognition of their efforts to promote access to employment and integration of refugees in Italy. Awarded companies include 15 large-sized companies (e.g. Barilla, Gucci, Sky Italia, Roberto Cavalli, Adecco Italia, Decathlon Italia, PWC), and medium and small-sized companies covering various sectors, from agriculture to hospitality. Since 2017, 120 companies were awarded the UNHCR logo. UNHCR issued a [press release](#) and a [video](#) featuring some of the refugees who benefited from the project.

UNHCR at Hack Belgium Innovation Festival - On 28 March, UNHCR’s External Relations and Private-Sector Partnerships (PSP) units participated in the [Hack Belgium Innovation Festival](#) in Brussels, where 50 companies exhibited their latest digital innovations. Liege joins #CitiesWithRefugees prior to benefit concert for UNHCR: On 23 March, UNHCR attended a benefit concert organized by the city of Liege and attended by the Walloon Minister of Culture where funds raised were donated to UNHCR.

Following UNHCR’s advocacy for #CitiesWithRefugees in the preparatory meetings, the city of Liege joined this coalition one day before the concert. Launch of 2 Billion Kilometres campaign in Belgium: On 27 March, UNHCR Belgium launched the 2 Billion Kilometres campaign by releasing a new [campaign video](#) involving famous football players from the Belgian Football Association.

Youth of Concern benefitting from the 89th International Session of the European Youth Parliament (EYP) in Yerevan

By Anahit Hayrapetyan in Yerevan, Armenia



250 young people from 36 countries gathered last week in Yerevan, Armenia for the 89th International Session of the EYP. This was the first time Yerevan hosted the flagship event where Ayb high-school welcomed students and youth from around the world. The EYP Session held from 09-17 March allowed participants to meet and discuss issues affecting youth in Europe under the motto: “Overcoming global challenges together”. In partnership with the EYP, UNHCR facilitated refugee youth’s participation by lending support to refugee youth to participating in the event. A group of ten young people (seven girls and three boys) representing Armenia and Georgia, participated in the nine-day event, among them were refugees and displaced youth from Iraq, Iran and Syria, an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan and an internally displaced individual (IDP) from Abkhazia. For some refugee youth, this was their first travel experience. “We were impressed by the cooperative and easy-going atmosphere and the feeling of being equal, different and similar at the same time”, said Ojeni and Nanor from Syria. They expressed that the EYP helped them ‘see the world’, understand the value of education, knowledge of different languages and cross-cultural exchange. The young men and women held debated on a broad range of critical issues from socio-economic situations to technological advancement. At the end of the session the student led Committees presented, debated and adopted their concluding resolutions to be shared with decision-makers across various European insinuations.



EVENTS IN MARCH

High-Level Regional Conference on the Quality Initiative for Asylum Systems in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus (QIEE)

The United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR) and the six countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) involved in the Quality Initiative for Asylum Systems in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus (QIEE) convened on 13 March 2019 in Geneva to take stock of progress achieved during the six years since the project was launched, and to discuss how to jointly tackle the remaining challenges faced by the participating countries in establishing sustainable national asylum systems and ensuring continuous capacity development of relevant stakeholders.

The High-Level Conference gathered senior officials in charge of the asylum authorities of the six participating countries and high-level representatives from UNHCR, including the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe, and the Deputy Directors of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Division of International Protection. The Conference provided an opportunity to review the challenges faced in key areas of asylum system building, the international standards

for fair and efficient asylum procedures, how to preserve national security without undermining international protection obligations, and what measures can be envisaged to ensure the well-being of staff working within the asylum systems.

The Conference was also held in the context of a dialogue that has started between UNHCR and Member States of the UN, as well as other stakeholders from civil society, the private sector and academia, following the adoption of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) with a view to showcase good practices to advance the objectives of the Global Compact and present pledges at the upcoming first [Global Refugee Forum](#) to be held in December 2019.

The Conference affirmed that the QIEE project has built a community of professionals in the field of asylum in Eastern Europe, which achieved substantial results in establishing asylum systems that correspond to international standards. The event also demonstrated UNHCR's continued commitment to supporting the Governments of the concerned countries in their continuous efforts to develop sustainable, fair and efficient asylum procedures, which provide effective international protection to refugees in the region.

