

Intervention at the Synergy Network digital conference “Protection Refugees, Migrant and Asylum-seeking Women and Girls”, 30 March 2022, Eva Kløve, Financial Mechanism Office (FMO).

Good afternoon!

Let me start by commending the Synergy Network for organising this very timely conference, and for providing relevant stakeholders with much needed space and inspiration to discuss actions that can create a safer environment for women and children, including those fleeing the war in Ukraine.

We highly appreciate this initiative.

Last year you discussed the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. Member States across Europe recorded a sharp increase in reported incidents of domestic and gender-based violence due to the pandemic.

With the invasion of Ukraine, many fleeing women and children are faced with additional challenges, including the risk of human trafficking, which has been increasing dramatically over the last weeks.

International cooperation, as well as collaboration between civil society and central/local authorities in individual countries, are **crucial instruments** in safeguarding women and children fleeing their homes and settling in Europe.

Together with the International and European Human Rights Framework and the UN Geneva Convention for Refugees, the **Istanbul Convention** is of course a key legal framework addressing relevant issues related both to **urgent** and to more **long-term** needs, and this framework is of *fundamental importance* to ensure the rights of women whether they are migrants, refugees or asylum-seekers. The convention adds to the many useful tools provided by the Council of Europe, several of which you have heard about today.

As many of you are aware of, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway support programmes that counter **domestic and gender-based violence** through the EEA and Norway Grants in nine countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia. The overall

funding provided is almost 30 million euros, and projects will be implemented until end of April 2024.

The Grants support projects focusing on **prevention, protection and response**.

Furthermore, the EEA and Norway Grants support **migration programmes** in four countries - Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, focusing on migrants and asylum seekers in vulnerable situations. The overall funding for these programmes is close to 48 million euros.

Through the programmes, the Grants seek to improve the capacity of national authorities to develop a **sustainable** asylum and migration system through training and improved working methods, case handling and reception facilities.

The Grants aim at strengthening the civil society contribution in this area, and the interaction between authorities and non-governmental organisations.

In Bulgaria and Romania, the Grants help to improve the **conditions for vulnerable migrants**. In Romania there is also a focus on improving the **response capacity** in the instance of a mass influx of migrants.

In Greece, reception centres funded by EEA Grants are preparing to receive Ukrainian refugees. Youth Centers funded by the Grants in Bulgaria are also able to open up for accommodation of refugees.

Through the **international police cooperation**, the EEA and Norway Grants support cooperation between authorities, including national law enforcement authorities, and relevant stakeholders such as non-governmental organisation and the general public, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.

In addition, **combating transnational crime**, including cybercrime, trafficking, and smuggling in human beings is an important area of support in several programmes, for example in Poland where a project on organised crime and trafficking in human beings is implemented in cooperation between Polish law enforcement authorities and the University of Oslo as donor project partner.

Response to the war in Ukraine

The EEA and Norway Grants are not set up as an emergency funding mechanism, and the focus of the Grants is to implement already agreed programmes.

Nevertheless, the Donors (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) are aware of **the urgent challenges** the war in Ukraine has created in several of the Beneficiary States. The Donors are therefore accommodating as much as possible to respond to this unprecedented refugee crisis.

The Donors **welcome initiatives from the Beneficiary States** to allocate available funds from the EEA and Norway Grants for this purpose.

The **Bilateral Fund** is considered the most appropriate source of funding, due to the close cooperation with the National Focal Points. Furthermore, due to the exceptional circumstances, the Donors have agreed that it is NOT a requirement to have a partner from the Donor States if the Joint Committee for the Bilateral Fund (the JSBF) agrees on the bilateral interest.

It is nevertheless encouraged to implement initiatives in partnership, where possible.

In **Romania**, the Joint Committee swiftly approved an additional allocation for an initiative to provide heated emergency tents. In **Slovakia**, the Joint Committee rapidly approved a bilateral initiative developing a reception centre with integrated services for refugees.

Moreover, the Donors are prepared to assess **reallocations towards the Bilateral Fund** from other available sources within the agreements. They are also willing to **consider new initiatives in relevant programmes**, where funds are available. And just to add: We just heard from our Polish partners that the long-term support provided by the Grants to civil society organisations has been a very important contribution enabling many of these organisations to support the refugees coming in to Poland.

The EEA and Norway Grants rely on partners to reach results, and we highly appreciate the commitment and excellent work done by **the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security** as one of the donor partners, and the **Council of Europe** as an international partner. In our day-to-day work, we see how your advice and support is sought after and highly regarded.

We are very happy to see that the **Synergy Network** continues to support cooperation across borders, across sectors and between relevant stakeholders.

We are also impressed by the responsiveness and solidarity of the national focal points, programme operators, project promoters and donor partners to address the additional challenges created by the war in Ukraine.

The first-hand account from **Tetiana** earlier today, gave us a heart-breaking realisation of the situation for people in Kiev and Ukraine today – and for those outside Ukraine worrying about their families at home.

At the Financial Mechanism Office, we hope and believe that today's conference has provided you with insights and inspiration to continue to address the challenges that lay before all of us.

Thank you!