

**Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe  
Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting  
“Policies and Strategies to Further Promote Tolerance and Non-Discrimination”  
Vienna, 14-15 April 2016**

Distinguished Chairperson,  
Dear Participants,

The past months have been marked by a significant and worrying trend of rising xenophobia and discrimination in countries across the OSCE region. Xenophobia and racism are often at the root of discrimination and intolerance against refugees and asylum-seekers. They are both, a frequent cause of flight as well as one of the main challenges refugees and asylum-seekers are facing upon their arrival in the new host country making it difficult to feel welcome and to successfully integrate into society.

We have lately witnessed a proliferation of xenophobic narratives, hate speech, fear-mongering, and inflammatory statements directed against refugees at all levels of society. This has not only threatened to undermine the institution of asylum, but also at times has even led to violence against refugees.

The current refugee and migration trends through the Mediterranean as well as recent security incidents in Europe and elsewhere underline the need for UNHCR, the OSCE, and partners to continue and intensify efforts to tackle this growing challenge. However, changing intolerant attitudes is a task too great for one organization to achieve on its own. To successfully combat racism and xenophobia, a broad range of actors including States, the UN and other international and regional organizations such as the OSCE, as well as NGOs, community groups, and the media must work together.

In 2009, UNHCR issued a guidance paper on combating racism and xenophobia through a strategic approach<sup>1</sup>. The guidance paper defines the impact xenophobia has on UNHCR’s protection mandate and it provides advice on how to mitigate xenophobia through attitudinal change. Providing individual support to victims remains a priority for UNHCR but affected communities must be included as well in all stages of efforts to combat intolerance. Underlying reasons for discrimination, xenophobia, and

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<sup>1</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Combating Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance through a Strategic Approach*, December 2009, available at:  
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b30931d2.html>

intolerance – such as rising immigration or high unemployment – must be understood in order to develop effective counter-measures. As part of UNHCR’s actions to combat xenophobia, we are also compiling good practices that our offices have developed over the years.

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between ODIHR and UNHCR in 2011 intensified the cooperation of the two Organizations on tolerance and non-discrimination issues. This MoU was renewed in 2015, broadening its scope and covering activities in the interface between ODIHR’s human dimension work and UNHCR’s international protection mandate. Upon invitation of UNHCR, last month an expert meeting with the main agencies active in this field, including ODIHR, took place in Geneva, where strategies for addressing racism and xenophobia were discussed.

To conclude, we must join efforts to tackle the root causes of all forms of intolerance, in recognition of the consequences that racism and xenophobia can have to the displacement and plight of persons in need of safety from violence and persecution today.

Thank you!

UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and  
Vienna-based UN Agencies  
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