
HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON LEGAL PATHWAYS TO PROTECTION

Intervention by Arnoldas Abramavičius, Vice-Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania

Dear Commissioner, dear participants,

I would like to start by stating that for years the European Union has been a leading global actor and donor providing protection and assistance to forcibly displaced people around the world.

However, today the gap between global resettlement needs and the EU's resettlement efforts is growing. And that is not for no reason.

I will speak on the situation in Lithuania. These few years were extremely challenging for us.

Last year was marked by hybrid attack and instrumentalized migration by Belarus regime. Our asylum and migration management system was not ready for such a flow. It took time and a lot of efforts to stabilize the situation at our borders.

But even in this context, Lithuania took part in responding to humanitarian and displacement crisis in Afghanistan. We have admitted 199 Afghans – 179 interpreters and their family members from Afghanistan evacuated during a special operation in Kabul, others were resettled from Kosovo.

We will follow our commitments as much as our capacities will allow.

And this year, since the beginning of Russia's aggression, more than 70 000 people fleeing the war in Ukraine arrived to Lithuania. Almost 25 000 of them are minors. By the ratio of persons, who received temporary protection, and national population, LT is 4th place in the EU [$\sim 2,5\%$].

In the upcoming winter season Lithuania is preparing for a second wave of Ukrainians. We would be ready to additionally welcome about 20 000 of Ukrainians.

These people, fleeing the horror of the war, spend hours at our border crossing points in order to enter the EU in legal manner. It is our duty to help them.

I am glad to notice that more than 20 000 of Ukrainians found jobs in Lithuania and are active participants of our labour market.

Based on our experience, I would like to share 2 insights

First, it is obvious that in case of real emergency people are searching for safety in the nearest neighbourhood. This is a preferable option because they can quickly come back home once it is safe enough. Also, it is often more acceptable due to socio-cultural reasons.

Therefore, we should do our best to ensure safe conditions in the neighbouring countries / same region, supporting low- and middle-income countries hosting big numbers of the world's refugees.

Second, resettlement has proved to be an effective way to seek asylum for many persons around the world. This pathway should be further promoted with the help of our partners, like UNHCR, and at least partially replace irregular arrivals to seek international protection.

We are generally in favour of complementary legal pathways as an alternative to irregular and dangerous options.