SUMMARY REPORT

Final Event of Joint OSCE-UNHCR Webinar Series

"Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Migrants and Refugees: Importance of Alliances and Consolidated Approaches"

Held via Zoom, 17 December 2021

The topic of *"Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Migrants and Refugees"* is linked to the mandate and work of both the OSCE as the largest regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter and its comprehensive security approach, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the exercise of providing international protection to refugees and other persons of concern. Following the success of a pilot webinar on *"Combating Hate Speech and Toxic Narratives about Migrants and Refugees"* held in July 2020, and considering increasing incidents of intolerance, discrimination, hate speech and hate crime against migrants and refugees, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), the OSCE Secretariat (External Cooperation Section), and UNHCR agreed to jointly organize a series of webinars throughout 2021. The first webinar focused on *"Discrimination on Social Media and Ways to Address it"* (9 March), the second one on *"Shaping Positive Public Perceptions and Attitudes towards Migrants and Refugees in Host Societies"* (18 May), and the third webinar focused on *"Access to and Use of Media by Refugees and Migrants"* (7 July). The fourth and concluding webinar of this joint series was held on 17 December, dedicated to the topic of *"Importance of Alliances and Consolidated Approaches"*.

This final event of the webinar series closed a cycle of discussions in 2021 surrounding the increasing challenges of intolerance, discrimination, as well as incidents of hate speech against migrants and refugees in the OSCE area. It intended to present the OSCE participating States and its Partners for Co-operation the good practices and approaches identified, and to design a way forward to tackle these challenges by mitigating the increasingly negative narratives surrounding migration and forced displacement.

Introductory session and kick-off panel

In his opening remarks, **Ambassador Tobias Lorentzson**, **Deputy Permanent Representative of the 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship**, highlighted that democracy and the respect for human rights and rule of law lie at the core of OSCE's concept of comprehensive security and are prerequisites for equal, free, and resilient societies, which in turn create more security within and between states. Yet, problems related to intolerance and discrimination remain deeply embedded across the OSCE region. All 57 participating States have recognized the importance of supporting migrants' integration and counteracting xenophobia. They have agreed to continue to work on migration management by respecting the human rights of migrants, to increase efforts to combat discrimination, and to advance dialogue on migration-related matters. Ambassador Lorentzson

praised the joint efforts of UNHCR and OSCE and reiterated the need for the multilateral approach in combating intolerance and discrimination against migrants and refugees, underlining the need to build coalitions and alliances. Of equal importance was access to reliable data. He expressed concern about the fact that ODIHR's latest hate crimes report documented that some participating States do not report hate crimes, leaving victims invisible and without support. Ambassador Lorentzson reiterated that promoting tolerance and non-discrimination was based on an inclusive approach in a society where everyone is equal in dignity and rights.

Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, pointed to several OSCE documents and Ministerial Council decisions, which call upon the RFoM to pay increased attention to manifestations of aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and violent extremism, and to counter intolerance and discrimination on the ground of racial or ethnic origin, religious, political or other opinion. It is in light of these commitments that the RFoM approaches the issue of harmful content, in particular so-called hate speech, through awareness raising, education and regular meetings with journalists and editors. She stressed the need for stringent ethical standards to guide media coverage of important social phenomena such as migration to avoid stereotyping. Media may also contribute to myth busting, debunk misinformation and hold politicians to account. In this regard, Ms. Ribeiro recalled the October 2021 first Joint Declaration on Politicians and Public Officials and Freedom of Expression by UN, OSCE, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), which acknowledges that politicians and public officials play an important role in shaping the media agenda, public debate and opinion. As a result, ethical behaviour including in their public communications is essential for promoting the rule of law, the protection of human rights, media freedom, and intercultural understanding. The Representative noted that media pluralism means a diverse media landscape, but also diversity of voices reflected. In her opinion, migrant journalists may have an important role to play in their new homes and they can reach out to their audiences in countries of origin, blurring the lines between exiles and local reporters. In this regard, the RFoM pointed to MC Decision 03/2018 on Safety of Journalists which calls on all participating States to prevent all attacks and violence against journalists.

Ambassador Luca Fratini, Director of the Office of the OSCE Secretary General, expressed deep concern about the shortcomings in migration crisis management the OSCE witnessed this year. He regretted the continuous xenophobic attitudes both online and in the form of real-life violence towards a rising number of people seeking shelter in OSCE participating States. The Ambassador highlighted that migrants and refugees also still largely rely on media and governments to voice their concerns, but often do not have access to internet or electronic devices. The negative impact of discrimination, hate speech, silencing, and intimidation goes beyond borders causing distorted perceptions of their lives and the struggles they encounter while trying to secure safety and wellbeing. This final webinar offers a renewed opportunity to improve understanding, explore common solutions and build alliances on this important topic. He stressed that, as established by the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 03/16 on OSCE's Role in the Governance of Large Movements of Migrants and Refugees, the OSCE's role is *"to serve as a dialogue platform on migration-related matters with the view to developing possible effective measures and common approaches".* The OSCE's benefit in the discussion on the governance of large, regulated movements of people rests with addressing the complex migration-security nexus, aiming to strike a fine balance between the securitization of the topic and the broader migration discourse. Ambassador Fratini noted that the enormous challenges posed to the OSCE region after the Afghanistan crisis in 2021 are a concrete reminder of the need for such a comprehensive approach. Migrants and asylum-seekers face hardship at every stage of their

journey; it is therefore the responsibility of participating States to make sure that they do not face additional discrimination and have the possibility to raise their voices.

Christoph Bierwirth, Head of the UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN Agencies (LOV), highlighted that systemic and systematic discrimination is among the root causes for forced displacement. Considering the rising numbers of persons of concern to UNHCR as well as newly evolving and reviving conflicts, the Organization's mandate of finding durable solutions for refugees cannot be achieved without the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination, which are necessary elements for the successful integration or reintegration of refugees and IDPs in society. Collaboration between UNHCR and the OSCE over the years has demonstrated that discrimination against refugees and migrants is often part of broader discrimination patterns against marginalized segments of society and follows deeply rooted "othering" mechanisms. According to Mr. Bierwirth, refined multi-vector approaches as well as persistent systemic efforts are needed to ensure progress in tackling discrimination. He outlined key elements for successful anti-discrimination strategies, namely (i) the promotion of interaction in all forms between refugees and host populations, or more generally between all segments of society, (ii) the sharing of positive and differentiated narratives and creating a welcoming integration-prone environment, and (iii) the inclusion of refugee and migrant voices in the media. Mr. Bierwirth asserted the importance of multi-stakeholder approaches and the involvement of international and regional organizations which can, in line with their respective mandates, promote tolerance and non-discrimination. Lastly, he invited OSCE participating States to share and present their approaches in identifying and combating different forms of intolerance and discrimination as well as discuss practical ways to address them.

Associate Professor Dr. Regina Polak, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, underlined that the most common features of hate crimes documented in the recent OSCE/ODIHR hate crime report are violent attacks against migrants and ethnic minorities, as well as damage to businesses and properties owned by or associated with ethnic communities. In some states, political leaders contribute to the fueling of intolerance against migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees with their statements. Regarding support to OSCE participating States in combatting discrimination and violence and developing integration plans, Prof. Polak noted the indispensable role of civil society and human rights defenders and expressed concern regarding the shrinking space for said actors in some OSCE participating States. To foster and strengthen collaboration and cooperation, ODIHR has identified coalition-building as a winning strategy, as described in the 2018 ODIHR publication [Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: A Practical Guide](). Prof. Polak described two examples included in the Guide: (i) the European Forum of Muslim Women's Collaboration with the Media Diversity Institute and other civil society organizations (CSOs) on the "Get the Trolls Out!" project, (ii) and the Racist Violence Recording Network in Greece which constitutes a model of a coalition partnering with law enforcement to implement best practices in protecting vulnerable communities and to accurately track and report hate crimes. She concluded her speech by reiterating OSCE's support for the building of such coalitions.

Panel on good practices and approaches identified in the OSCE area

Malte Blas, **Communications Associate/Digital Engagement, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe**, spoke about UNHCR's engagement in countering intolerance and discrimination on social media in Europe with over 100 social media channels in about 50 countries. In his presentation, he outlined common types of intolerance and discrimination on social media, namely negative narratives, misinformation, generalization, silencing, personal attacks, harassment, intimidation, spamming and direct threats, incitement to violence, hate speech, and doxing. He

provided insight into a series of important issues such as algorithms and negative feedback loops, promoting dialogue and freedom of expression, real-life consequences and worst-case scenarios that can lead to people coming to physical harm in the real world, escalation and spheres of influence. Mr. Blas went on to describe various spheres of responsibility, including social media pages, social media platforms and national laws and regulations. He outlined a series of communication strategies promoting positive narratives, giving a voice to refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people and other people of concern, raising awareness about their circumstances and their challenges, reaching out to new audiences, and countering myths and misinformation. He provided examples of instances in which UNHCR highlighted personal stories of how refugees contribute positively to their community, success stories of goodwill ambassadors, and examples of communication strategies promoting tolerance through sports events. According to his experience, the strongest and most effective strategy of countering hate speech online is by presenting the voices of migrants themselves and by using partnerships to amplify these voices to reach the largest and most diverse audience possible. Focusing on targeting the "middle", undecided population and trying to reach audiences that have not necessarily been exposed to UNHCR's messages, was also important, in addition to measuring impact through monitoring. Monitoring is constantly refined and innovated, which shows that UNHCR's reach is ever increasing. An avenue that has been demonstrated to be very impactful is that of tapping into channels such as TikTok where UNHCR successfully manages to target youth before they reach extreme fringes.

Voislav Stojanovski, National Rule of Law Officer, OSCE Mission to Skopje, provided an overview of the dynamics of migrant and refugee arrivals in North Macedonia in 2015. He noted that when migrants were allowed to transit through North Macedonia, a visible increase in intolerance, discrimination, hate speech, and hate crimes against migrants was registered. He informed about the Mission's project "Support of national concerned parties in the fight against hate crimes and hate speech" and the corresponding website Report Hate Crimes. This monitoring portal was devised together with the local Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in three languages to document and submit reports on hate crimes in the country. Mr. Stojanovski explained that the reasoning behind the creation of a separate category of hate crimes specifically targeted towards refugees and migrants was to highlight that these hate crimes, unlike other crimes, are also framed by an expectation that migrants will not report attacks, because they do not want to interact with the police and authorities. The map on the website shows that the majority of hate crimes connected to refugee or migrant status take place along the railroad through which migrants enter North Macedonia, transit, and leave towards Serbia.

Milos Bogicevic, Head of Human Rights, OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), illustrated how in 2019 the Mission designed and performed the public survey Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Public Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences and the insights the research gave on how the general population feels about migration in BiH. The survey, based on a representative sample of over 1,000 people, provided data for an analysis of individual attitudes and stereotypes on migration to help design nationally tailored activities in response. Nine out of 10 people in BiH saw discrimination as the major issue the country is facing, and 73% of respondents found discrimination against migrants widespread in the country, the percentage being higher for interviewees with higher education and income. Mr. Bogicevic further delineated the disconnection between such results and the 78% of respondents who showed aversion to the possibility for migrants to settle in BiH. He underlined the necessity for the Mission to address this contradiction in its work. The results of the public survey are, indeed, being used for multiple purposes, i.e. awareness-raising, the Mission's public campaigns on social media, and for further development and survey repetition by university students and researchers. Being a benchmark for future studies, the survey allows to analyze the shift of the general attitudes towards migrants

and refugees in BiH. The survey conducted by the Mission assessed specifically how media reporting influenced the public opinion on migrants and refugees and uncovered the focus of media narrative on political bickering and the use of migration discourse for political campaigning. A later survey, conducted by the BiH Journalists Association and based on 100 reports from online, print, and TV outlets, exposed that news reports portrayed migrants and refugees as dangerous for citizens. These reports circulated sensationalist and unsupported claims, reinforcing the negative general attitude towards migrants.

Theodora Tsovilli, Senior Protection Associate, UNHCR Representation for Greece, showed a video on the [Migratory Birds] project, a multilingual newspaper created in 2016 by a group of refugee youth and now circulating as an insert with the nationwide newspaper *"Efimerida ton Syntakton".* Its publication is carried out by the Network for Children's Rights, with the support of UNHCR and co-funding by the EU. Young journalists with different backgrounds, nationalities, and languages collaborate to create the newspaper. The articles are published in five languages and share the views, dreams and identities of the journalists. Through this project, they can explore and experience their diverse identities going beyond those of a migrant or a refugee and show their ability and eagerness to integrate into European society. The main goal of the newspaper is to promote intercultural dialogue, to represent young people seeking refuge in Greece, and to help them exercise their rights and strengthen their inclusion in society. Moreover, "Migratory Birds" has a positive impact on society as it allows readers to encounter the "unknown" gradually and optimistically.

Teresa Albano, Economic Affairs Officer, Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), illustrated the [E-MINDFUL] project, co-funded by the European Commission, and its two-fold impact regarding labour market integration of migrants, and the promotion of effective policies for their labour integration in highly polarized societies. Having acknowledged that promoting effective policymaking is increasingly difficult in a public debate that resists evidence and relies on the emotional side, the E-MINDFUL project aims to assess the strengths and weaknesses of information campaigns and to deliver a prototype and guidelines on effective communication on migration through a message that can resonate beyond already supportive audiences. The project engages young creators and broadcasting actors from Italy, Austria, Germany, Serbia, BiH, and North Macedonia. The final message to share with governments and other actors involved with the campaigns will be in a so-called "edutainment" format, a combination between education and entertainment, to engage and resonate with audiences. Ms. Albano informed that the blog [The power of narrative: Why the way migration is communicated, matters] was developed as part of the visibility plan of the project. Ms. Albano pointed out that E-MINDFUL is innovative because of its geographical coverage and added that she perceived openness towards the discussion on the delicate topic of migration during her latest tour in the Western Balkans.

Ahmed Bazoon, Member of the UNHCR Refugee Advisory Board and Rumour Free Campaign, outlined the independent and non-political project of the [Rumor Free Campaign], which collects rumors and fake information among and about refugees in Bulgaria to help distinguish fake news from accurate information. The website was developed by the Refugee Advisory Board with the help of UNHCR in four languages, including Bulgarian, to provide both the refugee community and the host society with access to correct and unbiased information and to counter negative stereotypes against migrants and refugees. The work of the Rumor Free Campaign focuses on selecting news from social media – specifically those that circulate within the refugee community – and running checks on such information to correct and update it with official data from Bulgarian partners. The website offers users the opportunity to contact the

members of the Refugee Advisory Board in the language they prefer. Lastly, Mr. Bazoon shared the intention to develop a radio version of the website in the future.

Nadia Bellardi, Project Manager, Community Media Forum Europe, showed a clip from the second edition of the Refugee Radio Network-organized [Conference on Migration and Media Awareness](#) (Hamburg, 28-30 October 2021), a meeting point for journalists and activists with a migrant or refugee background involved in community media. Ms. Bellardi explained that community media can take the form of local radio, TV and online multimedia projects that stand out for their non-profit and independent status, participatory processes, community ownership, management, and content production. Ms. Bellardi added that the [European Media Pluralism Monitor](#) identifies the access to community media for minority groups as one of the indicators of social inclusiveness in a pluralistic media system. Ms. Bellardi referred to the study commissioned by the Council of Europe called [Spaces of Inclusion - An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media](#) where refugees were interviewed and innovatively portrayed as producers, audience, and participants in the community media. The study showed that such media counter misrepresentation and promote freedom of expression and access to information in a known language, the latter being crucial during the pandemic. Furthermore, community media are liminal spaces that provide digital skills and ethical journalism training to minority groups and function as a steppingstone to pursue careers elsewhere. Among the recommendations advanced by the study are the development of inclusive media policies for migrants and refugees at all levels. All media need to recognize them as respected members of the audience and provide critical media literacy skills to all groups in society to enhance their active participation. In terms of the nexus between self-representation in the media and extremism and hate speech, Ms. Bellardi stated that self-representation creates connection, promotes understanding, and helps counter misrepresentation. In a study not yet published by the University of Duisburg-Essen on whether community media can be a space to develop strategies to counter racism, it was indeed confirmed that community media fill the gap across ethnic, social, and age divides. The study further found that community media prevent stereotypes, racism, and discrimination, and serve as informal networks that can be a path to personal and professional integration.

Statements from the floor

Kyriakos Hadjiyianni, Vice-Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, recognized that public perceptions and attitudes towards refugees and migrants significantly impact the prospects of the positive contribution to host societies. Mr. Hadjiyianni claimed that the media and journalists need to differentiate between refugees and migrants and be aware of the negative impact that the use of threat frames has on the general attitude towards integration. He further affirmed that international organizations like the OSCE and civil society play a meaningful role in shaping a positive perception of refugees and migrants through the exchange of good practices and engagement of the population in volunteering activities connecting with migrants on a personal level. Mr. Hadjiyianni emphasized the difficulty for countries to shape such positive public perceptions while having internal difficulties resulting from other states' failure to fulfill their commitments, and ultimately called for a holistic solution to migration benefiting both individuals and states.

Debriefing, outcomes and key messages on co-operation and the way forward

Christoph Bierwirth, Head of UNHCR LOV, reflected on how to reach people beyond the audiences that are already converted, and encouraged the mainstreaming of communication between refugees, migrants, and host communities beyond the scope of the projects. Giving an example of the involvement of people of several nationalities in the vaccination campaign in Vienna, Mr. Bierwirth suggested that integration through non-refugee-specific networks like voluntary service should be considered thoroughly as a tangible indication of the positive contribution refugees and migrants make to host societies.

Alice Szczepanikova, ODIHR Migration and Freedom of Movement Adviser, informed about the recent ODIHR publication Shaping Balanced Political Discourse and Constructive Narratives on Migration: Guidance and Good Practice from the OSCE Region to empower local, regional, and national leaders and decision-makers to build a different narrative and a more balanced political discourse on migration. Ms. Szczepanikova outlined the guidance the report offers which revolves around three Rs: Resist, React and Reshape. Firstly, the report suggests *Resisting* to compete with other actors who produce toxic narratives, and resisting to take up their language and strategies. Stereotyped qualities should be avoided, even if they are positive, because they can reinforce listeners' biases and undermine refugees' and migrants' ability to have their unique and diverse experiences represented in public discourse about migration. Secondly, the report calls for *Reacting* to instances of xenophobic and racist language in a non-patronizing way and invites actors to take public concerns about migration seriously even if they are ungrounded because they still drive people's behaviors. Thirdly, the report encourages to *Reshape* migration discourses through affirmative, evidence-based narratives and solution-oriented messages that resonate with the audience and trigger empathy. In addition, in the long-term, *Reshaping* could include supporting public institutions in mainstreaming diversity through professional training and awareness-raising. Ms. Szczepanikova concluded by affirming that ODIHR will continue supporting exchange of good practices towards a balanced migration discourse among participating States and institutions.

Jürgen Heissel, Director, OSCE RFoM, acknowledged that refugee journalists and media workers in the OSCE region remain widely invisible as a group and echoed Ms. Ribeiro's reference to the MC Decision 03/2018 on Safety of Journalists, emphasizing the value of all journalists. Mr. Heissel affirmed that mainstream media should adhere to the most stringent standards when covering migration. He commended the role of community media in supporting migrant journalists. With regard to the RFoM mandate, Mr. Heissel stressed access to the media as one of the priorities, as well as adherence of the participating States to OSCE commitments against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and discrimination. He further noticed that, as the self-regulatory framework of online platforms has so far proven insufficient, legislative development in the OSCE area addressing illegal and harmful content online remains unavoidable. Speaking about content moderation in line with international standards on freedom of expression and other human rights, he called for a coordinated effort between tech companies, policy makers and experts. This effort should aim at establishing a common understanding and sharing of knowledge about the way platforms operate, the different manners in which perpetrators of hate speech may use platforms for their purposes, the panoply of measures and instruments available to state authorities and platforms, and the implications and trade-offs derived from different possible choices.

Luca Pianese, Senior Migration Security Expert, OSCE External Co-operation Section, agreed that migrants and refugees are under- and inaccurately represented and this can ultimately lead to divided societies. Hence, the need for a balanced and fair migration-related

reporting. Mr. Pianese affirmed the OSCE's active involvement in tackling polarized perceptions around migration and added that the Afghanistan crisis required a cooperative transnational response. He further urged participating States to make use of the OSCE and its resources for dialogue and international coordination when facing a threat that migratory crises pose to democracies and people on the move. In concluding, Mr. Pianese thanked UNHCR for its continuous support and highlighted the need to work closely together to further support social cohesion, diversity, economic growth, and innovation.

ANNEX 1: AGENDA

10:00-10:10   Welcome

- Ambassador Tobias Lorentzson, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Swedish Delegation to the OSCE

10:10-10:40   High-level opening (including Q&A)

Moderator: Kateryna Ryabiko, ODIHR First Deputy Director

- Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media
- Luca Fratini, Director of the Office of the Secretary General
- Christoph Bierwirth, Head of UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN Agencies
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Regina Polak, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions

10:40-12:10   Panel on good practices and approaches identified in the OSCE area

Moderators: Elena Cherniavska, RFoM Senior Adviser, and Sophie Hofbauer, UNHCR Senior Liaison Associate

On social media:

- Malte Blas, Communications Associate/Digital Engagement, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, on countering intolerance and discrimination on social media
- Voislav Stojanovski, National Rule of Law Officer, OSCE Mission to Skopje, on the project *"Support of national concerned parties in the fight against hate crimes and hate speech"* and the website *"Report Hate Crimes"*: Together with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the OSCE Mission to Skopje runs a <u>website</u> in English, Albanian, and Macedonian, where incidents of hate crimes can be reported and monitored in the country.

On shaping positive public perceptions and attitudes towards migrants and refugees in host societies:

- Milos Bogicevic, Head of Human Rights, OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, on developing responses based on public perceptions research based on *"Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Public Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences"* study
- Theodora Tsovilli, Senior Protection Associate, UNHCR Athens, on the Migratory Birds project
- Teresa Albano, Economic Affairs Officer, Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) on the E-MINDFUL project

On Access to and use of media by refugees and migrants:

- Ahmed Bazoon, Member of the UNHCR Refugee Advisory Board & Rumour Free Campaign, Bulgaria
- Nadia Bellardi, Project Manager, Community Media Forum Europe

Followed by Questions and Answers and Statements by OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation

12:40-13:00 Debriefing, outcomes and key messages on co-operation and the way forward

- Christoph Bierwirth, Head of UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN Agencies
- Alice Szczepanikova, Migration and Freedom of Movement Adviser, ODIHR
- Jürgen Heissel, Director, RFoM
- Luca Pianese, Senior Migration Security Expert, OSCE External Co-operation Section