

Good morning, Excellencies, distinguished guests,

Syria haunts us – since the outbreak of the conflict: Nine years of suffering and violence for millions of people. We see horrific destruction, caravans of people fleeing - from a safe place – watching TV or reading magazines. In our countries at best we meet refugees who struggle to rebuild their lives. Around 5.7m Syrians have become refugees outside their country; other 3.5 million are displaced within Syria. To that number we add today another 600,000 who are currently fleeing the Idlib region and get stranded on the Turkish border.

Turkey hosts already more than **four million** refugees, thereby the **highest number** of refugees in the world. 90 percent are Syrians [but also people from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan]. Since years Turkey has undertaken **commendable** efforts to support them.

This event gives us an opportunity to learn how the most vulnerable refugees receive support through cash transfers to cover basic needs and to get back to some normalcy – in relative terms. The **Emergency Social Safety Net** (ESSN) reaches today more than 1.7 million people in Turkey. It is the largest EU humanitarian programme ever with a budget of more than 1.7 billion EUR.

Allow me to put this specific support into context:

- The Emergency Social Safety Net is part of the EU's much bigger support through the so-called **'Turkey Facility' of EUR 6 billion**. It is supposed to run until the year 2025 and focusses on humanitarian (food, shelter) and longer term support: **education** - schooling is important to not create a lost generation and today 500,000 refugee children can go to school -; **health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support**. The funding comes from the EU budget and EU Member States contributions.
- Syrians have fled in many directions: **Lebanon** hosts around 1 million registered refugees; this is one in five people living in the country and the highest per capita number in the world. **Jordan** hosts 650,000 refugees, one in 15 people; **Iraq** and **Egypt** also host large numbers of refugees from Syria and elsewhere.
- Understanding that short-term humanitarian support is not sufficient to support those host countries in the wake of an ever more protracted Syrian conflict, the EU has established, in 2014, another instrument, the **Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis**, in short **'Madad'** fund ('madad' means 'hope'). Its volume today is 1.8 billion EUR with contributions mainly from the EU budget, from 22 Member States and Turkey. An important principle of the EU support is that it is aimed at refugees in vulnerable situations **and host communities**.
- A few months back I had the privilege to visit a vocational training programme near Sanliurfa in Turkey's South East, a region full of Syrian refugees and a centre of agricultural production. It has been a great honour to hand out certificates to people that had been trained for several months to integrate into the local economy as field workers and in processing companies. It has been heart-breaking and heartening to see the gratitude and hope in the eyes especially of the women participants. They looked forward to be able to support their families financially. The recruitment rate from those coming out of the training is high. The FAO implements the programme for the EU and other donors. It is also an example how we work with various partners – UN organisations and NGOs.

Let me conclude with highlighting a special trait of the Syrian refugee situation: When you think refugees you may think: **camps!** The Syrian refugees mostly live in urban agglomerations, in Turkey 98% live outside camps. **It is more difficult to reach them to provide assistance**, but they have – financial means permitting – **better access to the local shops and markets** to find what they need. With the Syrian crisis continuing since so long many of the refugees that at the beginning of their ordeal may have been able to sustain themselves financially have run out of money and have become even more vulnerable. This may have been one trigger to craft the innovative Emergency Social Safety Net. The achievements of this and other programmes would not be possible without our **humanitarian partners**, such as the **World Food Programme**, with which we are happy to be here today.

I am looking forward to learning myself about this cash transfer programme in the panel discussion that follows. And I applause the audacious masterminds behind its design and those that ensure that it reaches the most vulnerable.

Thank you.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Emergency Social Safety Network (ESSN programme in Turkey)

- The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), launched in September 2016, is the EU's largest ever humanitarian programme, with a budget of €1.725 billion. At the moment, the ESSN is run by the World Food Programme. As of 1 April 2020, the ESSN will be taken over by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- The ESSN provides the most vulnerable registered refugees with monthly direct cash transfers onto an electronic debit card to help them cover their basic needs in areas like food, shelter and education.
- More than 1.7 million refugees are benefitting from the Emergency Social Safety Net. This is the largest single humanitarian project in the history of the EU.
- The EU's humanitarian assistance around the world is channelled through its partners: UN agencies, International Organisations and International Non-Governmental Organisations.