

Furthermore, the Commission has put in place a Solidarity Platform, bringing together Member States and EU Agencies, to coordinate support to Member States in need. We presented a 10-Point Plan² for stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war against Ukraine, including on registration, transport, reception and in the fight against trafficking in human beings. We are making up to €17 billion available to support Member States in welcoming those fleeing the war. This amount can be used for schooling, housing and healthcare, for example.

Coming to the point you made on Syria, specifically, let me underline that temporary protection was considered in 2015-16. However, at the time it was not deemed most suited to the situation, which was characterised by the arrival of different nationalities crossing several countries before reaching the EU. Ukrainians benefit from visa-free travel³, meaning they are already entitled to travel wherever they wish within the European Union and the European Union was the first safe haven for people fleeing the war. This was not the case for Syrians or the many other nationalities arriving at the time. Temporary protection would therefore not have alleviated the overall situation and that is why the Commission proposed⁴ the mandatory relocation of Syrian refugees⁵.

I agree with you, though, that all the efforts I mentioned address only one strand of work and are, of course, not enough.

As President von der Leyen underlined⁶, the European Union has to take a human and humane approach on asylum and migration matters. Europe will always honour our values and extend a helping hand to refugees fleeing persecution or conflict – it is our moral duty.

Our responsibility starts in the home countries of those who come to Europe. People do not choose lightly to leave their homes and take a perilous journey. They do so because they feel they have no alternative. They put their destiny in the hands of unscrupulous traffickers who leave the most vulnerable behind. Criminals should never decide the fate of any human being or dictate who comes into our Union. We need to put the clear focus of our development cooperation on improving the perspectives of young women and men in their countries of origin. We need to invest in their health, in their education and skills, in infrastructure, sustainable growth and security. We must also disrupt and dismantle the traffickers' business models with every tool at our disposal. Criminals should never decide the fate of any human being or dictate who comes into our Union.

Within the European Union, we need specific and clear procedures on how to deal with vulnerable persons, such as those following search and rescue operations at sea, and early identification of needs through a yearly foresight report. We need procedures that focus on the asylum seekers and their needs rather than on how to deal with the application or how to determine responsibility for asylum claims.

² The 10-Point Plan, For stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war from Ukraine, of 28 March 2022

³ Regulation (EU) 2017/850 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 amending Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (Ukraine), OJ L 133 of 22.5.2017

⁴ Proposal for a COUNCIL DECISION establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, COM(2015) 286 final of 27.5.2015

⁵ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece, OJ L 239 of 15.9.2015

⁶ President von der Leyen, State of the Union Address 2020