

## Red Cross Societies Plea for Safer Passage to the EU

(Brussels) Today, a month after the Lampedusa tragedy, where hundreds of migrants on-route to Europe lost their lives, the Red Cross EU Office and Cecilia Wikström MEP are holding a conference at the European Parliament to advance discussions on creating legal avenues to access international protection in the EU. The event will provide an opportunity to examine the humanitarian consequences of *Externalisation*, a process which sees the responsibility for migration management shifted towards migrant's countries of origin and transit. Participants will also identify ways for the EU to overcome some of these challenges, particularly in face of the pressing demand for international protection resulting from continued conflict in Syria.

“As the drivers of forced migration become more complex, increasing numbers of people are driven to flee conflict, political upheaval, violence, disasters, climate change and development projects” says Roger Zetter, editor of the [2012 World Disasters Report](#) and professor at Oxford University, “we Europeans need to be more proactive both within Europe and in the main host countries in promoting the protection of fundamental human rights for forcibly displaced persons and developing sustainable solutions to displacement”. National Red Cross Societies are scrutinizing the numerous humanitarian outcomes of Externalisation both within and outside the EU, and have identified policy recommendations in their [Position Paper “Legal Avenues to Access International Protection in the EU”](#) for moving the debate forward. They have long-standing practical experience in working with and for vulnerable migrants; be it providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance, psychological or administrative support to those seeking safety in Europe. “On a daily basis, Red Cross staff and volunteers all over Europe and abroad are witnessing how the scarcity of options to enter the EU legally, coupled with the tightening of border controls, pushes migrants and asylum seekers to resort to riskier routes”, underlines Alexandra Segenstedt of the Swedish Red Cross, “this in turn reinforces migrants’ vulnerabilities and leaves them at risk of smuggling and exploitation”.

The **Conference *Shifting EU Borders and the access to international protection*** will be composed of two panel discussions with time set aside for questions and answers in order to foster debate among panellists and participants. A first panel, focusing on the protection of migrants in the context of shifting EU borders, will include speakers from Oxford University, Swedish Red Cross and the Council of Europe, who will expose the key vulnerabilities triggered by Externalisation. A representative from Frontex will also present how the Agency streamlines Fundamental Rights into its activities. A second panel, focused on the policy tools used for ensuring access to protection in the EU, will see representatives from the Lithuanian Presidency, European Commission and European Parliament present how recent and on-going policy initiatives aim to address these challenges. “We must show humanity and our solidarity with the persecuted. The Mediterranean sea cannot become a graveyard of migrants that hoped to reach safety in Europe. We cannot solely rely on third countries to implement our human rights values and we must uphold the standards that we have set ourselves. The process of externalisation of EU borders puts the EU's commitments at risk,

including the right to international protection and the principle of non-refoulement”, stresses Cecilia Wikström MEP ahead of the Conference.

In view of this conference, Leon Prop, Director of the Red Cross EU Office emphasises that the debate on protected entry in the EU must be advanced as a matter of urgency. “For instance, legal avenues like promoting the issuing of humanitarian and protection visas, and resettling higher numbers of refugees, should be further explored by the EU and its Members States.”, said Leon Prop Director. “The EU needs to ensure that international refugee law, and the norms, principles and standards of protection are respected at its borders and beyond. Illegal entry for the purpose of seeking international protection cannot be penalised”.

The process of externalisation is the focus of the new Red Cross EU Office publication [\*Shifting borders – externalising migrant vulnerabilities and rights?\*](#), which will be launched during this conference. Echoing the 2012 edition of the IFRC flagship publication, the *World Disasters Report*, which highlights the increasing number of people that are forcibly displaced, this new publication focuses on the acute vulnerabilities of forced migrants within the specific context of the EU migration and border control policy.

Find out more:

- [Shifting Borders – Externalising migrant vulnerabilities and rights?](#), Red Cross EU Office, November 2013
- [Position paper on Legal Avenues to Access International Protection in the EU](#), Red Cross EU Office, 27 February 2013
- [World Disasters Report 2012 – Focus on forced migration and displacement](#), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, November 2012
- [Position paper on the Right to Access to International Protection](#), Red Cross EU Office, November 2011
- [Resolution 3 Migration: Ensuring Access, Dignity, Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion](#), 31<sup>st</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, 28 November – 1 December 2011

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*Interviews with the Red Cross EU Office or with the Office of Cecilia Wikström, Member of the European Parliament, may be arranged upon request.*