

European Council on Refugees and Exiles

Annual General Conference 2019

And UNHCR Europe NGO Consultation

Organised by ECRE and UNHCR

Brussels, 23 and 24 October 2019

Venue: Renaissance Brussels Hotel, Rue du Parnasse 19, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Madrid Room

WORKSHOP 6

RETURN AT THE CENTRE OF EU POLICIES?

Title Return at the centre of EU policies: planning civil society response

Objectives

- To provide an update on EU return policies and practices
- To share updates on national-level work on return
- To gather input into ECRE's plans and identify opportunities for collective

Speakers **Moderator:** Claire Rimmer, ECRE

Comments: Alexander de Chalus, UNHCR

Open discussion with all participants welcome to contribute.

Description and structure Speeches, statements and documents all indicate that return will remain a high priority for the incoming EU policy-makers, as it was for the outgoing leaders. The Political Guidelines from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the responses to questions and comments in hearings at the European Parliament, show that the Commission considers it central to its emerging plans.

The Strategic Agenda prepared by the outgoing Council President, Donald Tusk and accepted by the European Council, along with the comments and actions of Member State governments, indicate that return remains crucial for them. Some of the questions posed by Members of the European Parliament, show that for some political groups return is now seen as an important priority.

Themes highlighted by policy makers include “effective return policy”, an expanding role for Frontex, working with third-countries on return, and harmonising reintegration support.

While ECRE has always accepted that return is part of migration policy, it argues that three preconditions need to be in place before return takes place: fair asylum decision-making; return processes in compliance with human rights; and monitoring post-return. Second, ECRE has also expressed its concern that the disproportionate focus on return is leading to human rights violations and diversion of resources. It also undermines European foreign policies.

In this context, what will be the fate of the proposed recast of the Return Directive? How will return be pursued by the new Commission? How will it feature in proposed Pact on Asylum and Migration? Will EU funding be channelled towards return rather than contributing to asylum systems and integration?

The workshop will be an open discussion among civil society to share plans for action on return. UNHCR will provide input on their positions and work, and also give their assessment of EU and civil society developments.

- It will aim to identify opportunities for cooperation to influence the EU’s policies and practices on return.
- It will start with an update on EU developments.
- Participants will share updates on their actions and work.
- UNHCR will add comments on its position and perspectives.

The final part of the workshop will cover plans for 2020-2022, with a focus on next year. Input will be gathered from the participants and opportunities for collective action on the topic will be identified.