



European Commission and Italy launch first ever EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis

Brussels, 15 December 2014

Brussels, 15 December 2014

The European Commission and Italy have signed today the constitutive agreement to launch the first ever EU Regional Trust Fund as a new strategic financing tool to mobilise more aid in response to the Syrian Crisis. The start-up funding provided amounts to 20 million from the EU budget and 3 million from Italy as the first founding donor. Additional funding is foreseen for 2015. The EU Trust Fund will initially focus on support to refugees and host communities in Syria's neighbouring countries.

While other already existing Trust Funds for affected countries operate only at a national or sub-national scale, the EU Trust Fund provides a *regional* scope responding to a *regional* crisis, thus enabling the EU and its Member States to jointly intervene flexibly and quickly in response to shifting needs during the crisis. The Fund will also bring strong efficiency gains on the financial side, as it can operate with overhead costs of significantly less than 5%, depending on the size of overall contributions. It could also become a funding vehicle for a future post-conflict reconstruction effort already being operational when the time comes.

This EU Trust Fund will address the massive and increasing resilience and stabilisation needs in Syria's neighbouring countries, in particular Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, as well as inside Syria.

Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission said: *"Today with the Syrian refugee crisis, we are faced with the biggest crisis in our neighbourhood for the last decades. During my visit in the region few weeks ago, I confirmed the EU determination to help the millions of refugees and internal displaced people where they are and the countries hosting them. With the new EU trust fund we hope to increase EU's assistance greatly. The EU is also committed to supporting efforts to reach a political solution to the crisis in Syria."*

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn stated: *"The EU continues to stand by the millions of Syrians who have become refugees and lost their homes in this terrible crisis. The new EU Trust Fund will allow the EU and its Member States to pool our resources into one single and flexible mechanism to better respond to the growing needs of these refugees and of the countries hosting them. The majority of refugees are children and youths, whose future holds little prospect and risks becoming a fertile breeding ground for radicalisation. Already today the conflict has direct consequences for EU security, notably through foreign fighters, illegal migration and the polarisation between religious communities. This is why we need to provide a more coherent and enhanced response."*

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy Paolo Gentiloni stated: *"I am convinced that this new instrument will effectively improve the quality of the assistance provided to refugees, host communities and Governments affected by the Syrian crisis. Since 2012, Italy has provided a total contribution of approximately 60 million € for both humanitarian relief activities and complementary early recovery needs in Syria and neighbouring countries. By establishing this strategic tool together with the European Commission, we are willing to increase our assistance and contribute towards providing a more coordinated response to this multidimensional crisis"*.

The EU Trust Fund is open to all EU Member States, as well as to other donors, public or private. It will enhance Europe's response to the crisis both as a donor and doer. The Arabic name of the Trust Fund is "Madad", broadly meaning providing help jointly with others.

This funding comes in addition to the special 2014 aid package of 180 million for Syria, Lebanon and Jordan adopted by the Commission on 4 December. The EU Trust Fund will as of next year be able to reinforce these ongoing programmes with additional funds, in particular as regards the urgent schooling needs of millions of Syrian refugee children.

Background on the Syrian crisis

The Syrian conflict is having a devastating and lasting impact on Syria and across the region. As of December 2014, with the conflict in its fourth year, the needs of the affected populations are of an unprecedented scale. 12.2 million people inside the country – over half of the Syrian population – of which 7.6 million people are internally displaced, are in need of urgent assistance, and more than 3.2 million refugees, plus their overstretched host communities in neighbouring countries need help on a daily basis. The number of conflict-related deaths has surpassed 191,000 and more than one million have been war-wounded.

The Syrian crisis evolved from initially peaceful protests for freedom and democracy that were brutally repressed by the Syrian regime towards a civil war, resulting in a prolonged and ever worsening humanitarian emergency, which today has transformed into a multidimensional and protracted political, security, and social crisis directly affecting several countries in the region – mainly Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, but also Turkey and Egypt. These countries' social and economic capacity to deal with the ever-growing influx of refugees is stretched to the limits. The generous hospitality of the host communities is now affected by growing social tensions, while additional refugee and internally displaced persons flows have been caused in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey by the advance of "ISIL"/Da'esh.

The neighbouring countries cannot cope with this massive refugee crisis in the medium to long term without significant additional support from the international community. The recent Berlin conference on the Syrian refugee crisis on 28 October confirmed this in a dramatic manner. On the occasion the international community reiterated its commitment to increase its support to the host countries. In response, the Union budget and Member States have so far mobilised more than **3 billion** since the start of the conflict (around 1.6 billion from the Union budget and nearly 1.5 billion from Member States), making it the main world donor in addressing the consequences of this crisis.

IP/14/2155