



Newsletter



Putting people first

Dear Reader,

My mandate is to foster the protection of human rights across the 46 countries of the Council of Europe. With Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine escalating and attacks on civilians becoming relentless, a ceasefire and a process toward a durable peace grounded in human rights seem more distant than ever. The attacks on Ukraine are also attacks on Europe's values. Standing with Ukraine is essential for Europe's future: right now, it also means safeguarding Ukrainians displaced across Europe.

Continued protection for Ukrainians displaced across Europe

With the welcome extended to Ukrainians fleeing the war in 2022, Europe did itself proud. Now, this welcome must be matched by a renewed commitment. This is time for more solidarity, not less.

At the Ukraine Recovery Conference, I warned against prematurely ending or restricting temporary protection for the over 4.3 million displaced Ukrainians across Europe. I outlined key recommendations for member states.

Transitioning displaced Ukrainians out of collective protection without a safety net risks driving millions into legal limbo, poverty, and unsafe, involuntary returns. Europe could not claim to stand with Ukraine, support its war effort, and help rebuild its economy were it to simultaneously pull the legal and economic rug from under 10% of its population. For this and other reasons, the decision to extend the EU Temporary Protection Directive is welcome.

Read my [Observations](#)

Safeguarding the dignity and rights of older persons in long-term care homes

This month, I began engaging with Council of Europe governments regarding the situation of older persons in long-term care facilities. My visits to Bulgaria, France and Romania have already revealed striking common threads: a lack of capital investment, deeply undervalued staff and a shortage of medical specialisation (geriatrics).

Read my end-of-visit statement for [Bulgaria](#) | [France](#) | [Romania](#)

The need for a Council of Europe legally binding instrument on the right to a healthy environment

The gravity of the environmental crisis, taken together with the extent of recognition of a right to a healthy environment at the level of states means that the time has come for a legally binding

Council of Europe instrument on the subject. This step will advance human rights across the continent and light the way for global progress.

Furthermore, environmental human rights defenders and civil society actors who expose environmental harm offer hope for our planet. States have an obligation to ensure they can carry their work freely and safely.

Read my [intervention at the first European environmental human rights defenders forum](#)

Reclaiming women's roles in peace and security

Women peace and security issues should be addressed as integral to the broader quest for peace and respect for human rights and for equality. At the annual conference of the Gender Equality Commission, I set out four areas in which we need to engage to reclaim women's roles:

- ◆ Overcoming patriarchy and misogyny
- ◆ Eradicating gender-based violence
- ◆ Embedding women, peace and security in peacetime and conflict prevention
- ◆ Building better partnerships across states and civil society, and across multilateral organisations.

Read my [speech at the Gender Equality Commission's annual conference](#)

Externalised migration policies

In Brussels and Geneva, I met with high officials to emphasise the importance of robust human rights safeguards in the implementation of reformed migration policies, including the Migration Pact and EU Return Regulation. Externalisation, as a globally relevant and increasingly sensitive issue, requires a clear human-rights based approach.

I also convened an expert group to discuss how we can build human rights risks assessments into state action in these areas.

Country focus

Armenia: Following my visit, I observed that Karabakh Armenians displaced to Armenia still need support with housing, documents, and long-term integration. A comprehensive, human rights-based integration strategy and continued international engagement are needed.

Read my [memorandum](#)

Georgia: I reiterated my call for the Georgian authorities to ensure the accountability of law enforcement and to reverse the growing restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, and expression.

Read my [memorandum](#)

United Kingdom: I reacted to the developments following the horrific stabbing incident in Belfast and how it has been instrumentalised to whip up an unacceptable, often violent backlash against people purely because of their nationality or their skin colour. While welcoming that both national and regional authorities have expressed their clear condemnation, I called on politicians, media and others in positions of influence to act responsibly and to ensure that their contributions to the public debate aim to diffuse tension, rather than to stoke division.

Read my [statement](#)

Serbia: I expressed concern about reports that criminal proceedings for serious police misconduct against a female student during the July 2025 Belgrade protests may be stopped through deferred prosecution. Discontinuing criminal proceedings for serious police misconduct through deferred prosecution risks further undermining trust in law enforcement.

Read my [reaction](#)

The next edition of my newsletter will be early September. In closing, I would like to share a quote from Madeleine Rees, former head of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF):

"Peace is about equilibrium. If we have inequalities, discrimination and binary narratives, we are automatically moving away from equilibrium, causing injustice and fear. And when you have fear, you have no peace."

Hope comes from putting people first.

Thank you for reading,

Michael O'Flaherty

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