**UNHCR and the Centre for Legal Aid sign a Memorandum of Understanding** **to support access of refugees to free legal assistance**

**Bratislava, 13 October 2022**

Today, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and the Centre for Legal Aid signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen partnership and collaboration with regard to ensuring access to qualified free legal aid of refugees, asylum-seekers, beneficiaries of temporary protection, stateless persons, and people at risk of statelessness. Certain individuals from these categories are often economically and socially disadvantaged, making them unable to efficiently and effectively access legal services that can help them understand, protect and defend their legal rights and interests.

UNHCR is a global organization, with presence in Slovakia, dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people worldwide, while the Centre for Legal Aid’s main mission in Slovakia is to provide people in material hardship with access to legal aid and the ability to effectively exercise their rights. Legal assistance to people in asylum, detention, and deportation proceedings has been part of the Centre's work for many years.

“Since this spring,” said Ms. Zuzana Števulová, Director of the Centre for Legal Aid, “the Centre has been actively helping people from Ukraine and supporting large-capacity centres. The Centre wants to further strengthen its activities in this area, and increasing access to justice and the integration of people with international protection into society is a huge part of this. We look forward to working with UNHCR to strengthen and support this agenda at such an important time.”

Under this MoU, UNHCR and the Centre for Legal Aid will collaborate on increasing awareness and strengthening the capacity of legal practitioners, Government officials, judges, interpreters, and other stakeholders on the protection of refugees and stateless persons, and organizing capacity-building activities related to asylum, temporary protection, and statelessness.

“I am very pleased that we have signed this Memorandum of Understanding, which is designed to help us deepen our cooperation in areas of common interest, first and foremost through expert support to the Centre for Legal Aid and other legal practitioners. The aim is to provide qualified legal aid to refugees and others of concern, to strengthen policy and legislation to ensure access to free and accessible legal assistance, and to bolster the protection of the rights of these vulnerable groups in Slovakia,” said Ms. Danijela Popovic-Efendic, Head of National Office, UNHCR Slovakia.

END

**Contact Information:**

Russell Fraser, External Relations Officer, UNHCR Slovakia, fraser@unhcr.org

Martin Mlynár, Project Officer, Centre for Legal Aid, martin.mlynar@centrumpravnejpomoci.sk

Further to the above, we also want to announce that the Centre for Legal Aid is opening its doors to people from Ukraine, and starting this month, the Centre will introduce special consultation hours for people from Ukraine in every office of the Centre throughout Slovakia. Clients can book a consultation via its Call Centre at 0650 105 100 or online at [www.centrumpravnejpomoci.sk](http://www.centrumpravnejpomoci.sk) .