

# THALASSAEMIA INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION

In official relations with the World Health Organization



## HEADQUARTERS

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## REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE - 70TH SESSION

Virtual session, 14–15 September 2020

## STATEMENT OF THALASSAEMIA INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION (TIF)

### Agenda Item 6.1 (f): “Progress report on implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant Health in the WHO European Region (resolution EUR/RC66/R6)”

Dear Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Thalassaemia International Federation welcomes WHO’s efforts to alleviate the many health issues that refugees and migrants have to face, while drawing attention to the needs of chronic disease patients.

Recent migrations are from countries with a high prevalence of thalassaemia and sickle cell disease, to low prevalence areas of Northern and Western Europe. For example, about 80% of the global carriers of the sickle cell gene are from Sub-Saharan Africa, most of whom enter Southern Europe **mainly from Italy and Spain**. Likewise, migrants from Iraq, Thailand, Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey, entering Europe from the Eastern borders of Greece and the Balkans, are mainly carriers of thalassaemia and epsilon globin (HbE) genes.

A major concern is the flow of refugees from war zones to neighbouring countries, which also have a high burden of these disorders. For example, Lebanon hosts around 1-1.5 million Syrian refugees while Jordan and Egypt have received around 700,000 and over 100,000, respectively. Among a total of 2.3 million Syrians living in these countries, there are 126,500 carriers and 8,000 thalassaemia patients, whose fate is to-date unknown.

Through this statement, TIF wishes to **bring this migration-related issue of chronic and hereditary diseases to the attention of all host countries** and urge them to reach out to society, identify patients and plan for their treatment in the best possible way. In addition, appropriate policies should be adopted to prevent all social, economic, medical and public health repercussions.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere appreciation and confirm our strong support for WHO’s efforts concerning the health of refugees and migrants. We are ready to work with all relevant stakeholders to address this major challenge.

Thank you for your attention.



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