

112th session of the International Organization for Migration Council: UK statement

Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

Our thoughts – and our deepest sympathies – are with those who lost their lives or their loved ones in last week's tragic shipwreck in the Channel.

The IOM's work for humane and orderly migration has no doubt saved a great many lives, but it is clear that – at 70 – your work is as critical today as ever.

The UK remains your partner and supporter.

We recognise that, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to reshape our world, its impact on the most vulnerable migrants has been profound.

Migrants have, of course, been at the forefront of the fight against the virus, contributing their skills and knowledge.

Here in the UK, they have played an incredibly valuable role within our National Health Service, on the front line of the fight to save lives.

Yet many migrants, who too often end up on the margins of society, have been disproportionately affected.

Many have lost their jobs, while others have been stranded, often without income, and unable to return home due to lockdowns and border closures.

This has left women, girls and children at particular risk from trafficking and exploitation.

Meanwhile, challenges in accessing COVID treatments and vaccines have compounded these problems in many parts of the world.

In the UK, we worked hard to ensure that vaccinations are available to all members of our society, in all parts of the country, and we have learned lessons along the way.

We must bear these lessons in mind as we work to rebuild from COVID.

Most importantly, we must also factor them into planning for future pandemics.

The new agreement on pandemic preparedness and response, discussed today in the World Health Assembly's special session, will play an important role here.

I welcome the IOM's support for this.

Yet COVID is not the only migration-related challenge we face.

People continue to be displaced from their homes, due to conflict in countries like Afghanistan and Ethiopia.

Meanwhile, in Belarus, a callous regime is orchestrating irregular migration across its borders, putting lives at risk every day.

Next May, when we come together for the first International Migration Review Forum, we will discuss our shared challenges and the progress made.

Migrants move in the hope of a brighter future, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure their safety and dignity.

The UK is committed to an inclusive recovery from COVID. A recovery that is for everybody, including the most vulnerable.

So, as we look forward to the Forum, we must be frank about what we have learned and forthright in our action, for a freer, fairer and safer world for all migrants.