

OSCE Special Representative on Gender: UK response, July 2022

Thank you, Mr Chair. I would like to thank the Special Representative on Gender for her remarks and welcome her warmly to this Council. We strongly endorse your messages on enhancing gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and underline their centrality to the future of our economies, societies, communities and the security of our region.

You are right to emphasise that the overwhelming threat that we face now is Russian aggression against Ukraine, and we welcome the report's focus on monitoring the situation of Ukrainian women refugees. 8 million people have left Ukraine since the conflict started, and as of 13 July, UNHCR recorded over 5.8 million refugees from Ukraine across Europe. The present situation constitutes the fastest-growing refugee crisis since the Second World War. That the current crisis is remarkable by the standards of over 75 years of events, war and terrorism puts President's Putin's actions into alarming context. Remember – this is a war of choice.

As we heard from Special Representative Richey earlier this week, the vast majority of refugees are women and children, and they are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking. We echo Special Representative Palihovici's call for training for police and border guards on human trafficking and gender-based violence, and will continue to share UK best practice and materials with local law enforcement partners. We have prioritised our humanitarian response to support the most at-risk populations, including women and girls, and we support the Special Representative's recommendation for all humanitarian actors to engage expertise to navigate gender-based violence and other protection issues.

We are deeply concerned by the persisting protection gaps for people with disabilities, children with special needs and minority groups – especially Roma women, as flagged in the report. We also highlight the additional challenges faced by older people. We must advocate for the most marginalised and at-risk people in our society, particularly under these cruellest of circumstances.

Special Representative Palihovici's report also highlighted the excellent work being done to help Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, Austria, Poland and Moldova. We commend these and other neighbouring countries for stepping up, and have provided £40 million to international agencies to assist their efforts. The UK will continue to support our partners shouldering the largest burdens from the fallout of Russia's war, and we continue to welcome Ukrainian refugees under our own Homes for Ukraine and Ukraine Family schemes.

Our message to Ukrainian people forced to flee the Kremlin's war is clear and simple: the UK and our partners will support you until the victory of your armed forces enables you to return home – however long it takes. Thank you,

Mr Chair.