

Continued crackdown on civil society in Russia: UK statement

Mr Chair,

We have previously expressed our deep concerns about Russia's legislation on so-called "undesirable organisations" and "foreign agents", which negatively impacts the work of civil society organisations in Russia. This legislation is being used to shrink the space for independent civil society in Russia.

The Russian authorities' recent designation of non-governmental organisations as "undesirable", including the designations on 30 June of the Future of Russia Foundation; the Khodorkovsky Foundation; the Oxford Russia Fund, and European Choice is unjustifiable and disregards the fundamental freedoms and human rights of Russian citizens.

They are actions which run counter to Russia's international human rights commitments, including under the OSCE's human dimension.

As OSCE participating States, we have collectively agreed on the important role played by civil society in helping us implement our OSCE agreements and commitments.

For example, in [Moscow in 1991](#) we recognised that the active involvement of such organisations helps to ensure continued progress against our human dimension commitments.

In [Istanbul in 1999](#), we confirmed our pledge to "enhance the ability of NGOs to make their full contribution to the further development of civil society and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms", and in [Maastricht in 2003](#) we pledged to support and help strengthen civil society organisations.

The current actions by Russian authorities are not in line with those agreements. They do not promote a safe and open environment for NGOs' activities and enable their continued growth.

We therefore urge, again, the Russian authorities to reverse these designations, to support the promotion of people-to-people contacts to the benefit of Russian citizens, and to take all measures necessary to fulfil their obligations under the OSCE's human dimension and other international human rights commitments.

UK backs Impact Investment Taskforce as road to pandemic recovery

- New industry-led Taskforce to increase private investment in aid of global recovery from the pandemic.
- Focus will be on finding investment solutions that have environmental or societal benefits, as well as generating financial gains.

A new, industry-led Impact Taskforce that will harness private finance at scale to ensure a sustainable recovery from covid, has received Government backing.

The Taskforce will be headed up by experts in impact investment, an approach where investors make financial decisions that have a positive impact on the environment or society – like investing in companies that produce affordable solar panels – as well as improving the bottom line.

Set to develop recommendations that will be made to Foreign and Development Ministers and the financial sector globally, the Taskforce will explore:

- Standards for measuring the social or environmental impact of financial investments simply, transparently and in a globally consistent way, making it easier for all investors to invest based on impact as well as financial return;
- Financial products that best mobilise investment, while also having a positive environmental and/or social impact. These include financial tools or instruments that can raise capital to tackle climate change, improve education, deliver better healthcare or labour markets creating equal opportunities for women.

The Taskforce will coordinate efforts in countries belonging to the G7, G20 and those attending this year's COP26 in Glasgow. The group is expected to first meet next month, with a dedicated working group of representatives from G7 countries, guest countries and emerging economies, bringing unique perspectives from impact investors and businesses at both global and local levels.

James Duddridge, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister:

The UK is once again shining a spotlight on the power of finance to drive not only growth in our economies, but also positive impact on our society and the environment. Having seeded the impact investing agenda in our last G7 presidency, we are delighted that the Taskforce will now draw on the experience and know-how of what has become a global impact finance market.

Nick, Hurd, Chair of the Impact Taskforce:

The state of our world requires a change in mindset from governments and the market. It will not be enough for private capital to do less harm. We need to mobilise trillions of dollars into investments that combine return with positive social or environmental impact. The Impact Task Force will show how that can be done.

Cliff Prior, CEO of the Global Steering Group for Impact Investment (GSG):

We are delighted to have been supported by the UK government to lead the secretariat of the Impact Taskforce. Robust reporting standards and innovative investment structures are absolutely central to the development of an impact ecosystem that benefits people and the planet. The creation of the Taskforce will highlight the power of impact investing during the UK's G7 presidency, as countries around the world seek solutions for fair and just recoveries from the COVID-19 crisis.

Sarah Gordon, CEO of the Impact Investing Institute:

Impact investment has the potential to contribute to solutions to some of the biggest challenges we face as a country, and a planet – whether that is a just recovery from the pandemic or addressing the climate crisis. To harness private capital at scale for public good, we need structures that meet investors' requirements and deploy capital where it is needed, improving access to decent jobs, education and healthcare, and investing in a just transition to a net-zero world.

[North East man sentenced for waste offences](#)

Fenwick, 57, of Court Road, Middlesbrough, appeared at Teesside Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 6 July, where he was sentenced for operating a waste transfer station without an environmental permit and failing to provide information to Environment Agency officers. He had pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing.

Prosecuting for the Environment Agency, Karen Warner told the court that between January and November 2020 Fenwick, who operates as CPR Skip Hire, was running a waste facility at Bolckow Industrial Estate, Grangetown, Middlesbrough.

A waste transfer station is an operation where waste is deposited, sorted into different types and then moved on to a landfill or recycling facility. They require a permit from the Environment Agency to protect the environment and communities.

Officers visited the site

An Environment Agency officer visited the site at the start of January 2020 where he saw 10 skips containing mixed waste including wood, plastic door and window frames, tyres and domestic appliances.

A fortnight later officers attended to speak to Fenwick on site, where he confirmed he was operating at the site as CPR Skip Hire. He said the skips on site had been there for months but the officer saw additional waste there from the previous visit – including Christmas trees.

Fenwick was advised to remove the waste. A further visit on 3 March showed the site had only been partially cleared and Fenwick was given more time to clear the site.

During additional visits later in the year officers saw further evidence of waste storage and sorting taking place, and when asked to produce waste transfer notes for the waste removed from the site he said he didn't have any and offered to fabricate some. In September, Fenwick was issued with a notice to provide the waste transfer notes for between 1 January and 23 September 2020 but these were not forthcoming.

Christmas trees were among the waste stored on site

Site is now cleared

On the day of sentence Fenwick provided evidence which showed the site had now been fully cleared of waste. He was sentenced to 12 weeks in prison suspended for 12 months, as well as 10 days of rehabilitation activity and an 8-week 7pm to 7am curfew. He was also fined £480, ordered to pay more than £4,000 in costs and a £122 victim surcharge.

John Crowl, Enforcement Team Leader for the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

Fenwick deliberately breached the law and despite being given a number of opportunities to clear the site and produce the relevant notes he continued to have a flagrant disregard for regulations which are in place to protect the environment and communities.

This result sends out the message to others that we take waste offences extremely seriously and reinforces our commitment to taking action against those who flout the law.

Waste offences can be reported to the Environment Agency's 24-hour Incident line on 0800 807060

National Minimum Wage rate reminder for summer staff

Students and seasonal staff are being reminded by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to check that they are being paid the National Minimum Wage (NMW).

All workers are legally entitled to be paid the NMW. This includes temporary seasonal staff, who often work short-term contracts in bars, hotels, shops and warehouses over the summer.

In the 2020 to 2021 tax year, HMRC helped 155,000 workers across the UK to recover more than £16 million in pay which was due to them. HMRC is reminding workers to check their hourly rate of pay, and to also check any deductions or unpaid working time.

One person who has benefitted from HMRC's enforcement of the NMW is Amber, a marketing apprentice. She was concerned that she was not being paid correctly, so contacted HMRC online. HMRC looked into Amber's concerns and spoke with her employer. Amber was being underpaid and she received £1,900 in back pay.

The National Minimum Wage hourly rates from 1 April 2021 are:

- £8.91 – age 23 or over (National Living Wage)
- £8.36 – age 21 to 22
- £6.56 – age 18 to 20
- £4.62 – age under 18
- £4.30 – apprentice

Steve Timewell, Director Individuals and Small Business Compliance, HMRC, said:

We want to ensure that seasonal workers and students are being paid what they are entitled to and, as the economy reopens, help employers if they are unsure of the rules.

Workers should check their hourly rate and look out for any deductions or unpaid working time which would reduce their pay. It could take them below the minimum wage.

HMRC investigates every complaint made about the minimum wage, so whether you are selling sun cream, giving a hotel room a clean, or serving a strawberry smoothie, if you think you are being short-

changed you should get in touch.

Anyone not being paid what they are entitled to [can complain via GOV.UK](#). If they want to speak with someone they should phone the Acas Pay and Work Rights Helpline on 0300 123 1100, who may transfer the call to HMRC.

Employers can also contact the Acas Helpline for free help and advice or visit GOV.UK to find out more.

More information about the [National Minimum Wage](#), including who is eligible, is available via GOV.UK. You can also [check your pay](#) via the campaign page.

You are entitled to the apprentice rate if you are an apprentice aged:

- under 19
- 19 or over and in the first year of your apprenticeship

If you are 19 or over and have completed the first year of your current apprenticeship, you are entitled to the [minimum wage for your age](#)

The 2 most common causes of minimum wage underpayment are deductions and unpaid working time. Examples include:

- expenses for tools or equipment needed for the job
- cost of uniform or clothing connected with the job
- travelling time between work locations
- training time

Employers who do not pay the NMW can be publicly 'named and shamed' and those who blatantly fail to comply can face criminal prosecution.

[Savers urged to be savvy before shifting savings](#)

Currently, when people want access to their savings, their pension scheme is only required to tell them that free, impartial guidance is available from Pension Wise.

New "Stronger Nudge" rules set out today, propose requiring trustees and pension scheme managers to make sure the individual has either received – or opted out of receiving – that Pension Wise guidance, before proceeding with their application.

Pension schemes will also be required to offer to book a Pension Wise appointment on the individual's behalf.

Minister for Pensions, Guy Opperman, said:

It is vital that savers have the support they need when making decisions about their pension pots that could have serious financial consequences for them in later life.

Pension Wise is a fantastic service that offers free, impartial guidance and so I want to see as many people as possible using it.

This change is vital in preventing savers from failing to take advice and increasing the take-up of the guidance that is available.

Where individuals do not wish to take up the offer of a Pensions Wise appointment the Department for Work and Pensions is proposing that they specifically opt out via a separate communication with the scheme, although some exemptions would be in place.

Pension Wise, the service promoted by the government, provides free, impartial, guidance to help individuals aged 50 and over with a defined contribution pension, understand the options available to them.

It is a valuable service and these proposals are designed to increase the take up of guidance by presenting Pension Wise guidance as a normal part of the process of accessing pension savings.

- The [consultation](#) can be found on GOV UK and is open for responses until 3 September 2021.
- The DWP is also consulting on draft regulations on pension transfers between schemes that will, if brought into force, place a duty on the trustees and managers of schemes in scope to refer customers to a scams guidance appointment, provided by Money and Pensions Service, if a proposed transfer is deemed to be a potential scam risk.

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