

First preparatory meeting of the 29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum: UK statement

Dear Secretary General Schmid, Ambassador Funered, distinguished speakers, excellencies, fellow delegates, dear friends,

The UK would like to thank you Ambassador Funered and your able team for the work that has gone in to preparing the agenda for this first preparatory meeting of the 29th Economic and Environmental Forum. The UK wholeheartedly welcomes your chosen topic of women's economic empowerment as the overarching theme of the Forum this year.

We consider this a pressing and serious issue. The World Bank estimates that even today over 2.7 billion women worldwide – many of them living in the OSCE region – are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men, and so have limitations to their equal access to economic prosperity unfairly placed upon them. Women are also less likely than men to participate in the labour market around the world. UN Women estimate that labour force participation rates for women aged between 25-54 are 63 per cent. For men, however, they are 94 per cent.

From a supply-side perspective, economic growth depends on the growth and skills of the labour force; the movement of people from low- to high-productivity activities; innovation and entrepreneurship; and investment in the education and skills of future generations.

A recent OECD study shows how gender-based discrimination in social institutions reduces productivity and economic growth by lowering both human capital investment and labour force participation.

So if our collective societies' prosperity is to be maximised, and therefore act as effectively as possible against the threat of instability and conflict, it is right that we focus our attention on these important topics. Beyond the gains for economic growth, gender equality can reduce poverty and foster a more equitable distribution of income – all elements that can prevent conflict. The link, therefore, between security and women's economic empowerment, is clear.

We all hope that 2021 will see the end of the COVID pandemic, which is why we support in particular the 2021 Chairpersonship in Office addressing this issue now. Globally, women will have been disproportionately economically impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Women are only half as likely as men to have full-time paid jobs in the formal economy, and certain sectors in which women are over-represented continue to be particularly hard hit. It is right that recovery measures prioritise gender equality to capitalise on this crisis and build back more just and inclusive economies and societies.

Ambassador Funered,

You can rely on the UK Delegation to contribute constructively, and support you wherever we are able. We welcome your typically inclusive approach, to bring together representatives from the business and scientific communities, as well as civil society and international organizations. Sharing the insights and expertise of these groups can only enhance our chances of success. We look forward to participating in, and learning from, a salient and interesting series of events you have prepared.

Thank you.

Robust border regime comes into force

From today (Monday 15 February), if you have been in a high risk destination on the [UK's 'red list'](#) – comprised of 33 hotspots with COVID variants in circulation – you will have to enter England through a designated port and have [pre-booked a quarantine package](#) to stay at one of the government's managed quarantine facilities.

Those arriving from today onwards that have not visited a red list country must still quarantine for 10 days at home and complete 2 mandatory COVID-19 tests on the second and eighth day after arriving.

The government has tough measures already in place requiring all travellers into the UK, from any location, to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken no more than 3 days before departure and non-UK residents from the 33 red list countries are already banned from entering Britain.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, said:

As this deadly virus evolves, so must our defences. We have already taken tough action to limit the spread, protect people and save lives.

With the emergence of new variants, we must go further. The rules coming into force today will bolster the quarantine system and provide another layer of security against new variants at the border.

These new measures are important to protect our vaccination programme, which has now seen 15 million people vaccinated, we all work towards restoring normal life.

The new measures that have come in to force today will further strengthen the UK's borders, limit the spread of new COVID-19 variants and potentially save

lives.

The tougher quarantine restrictions also carry heavier fines and penalties with potential prison sentences of up to 10 years.

Enforcement of new regulations

The government has also put in place new regulations equipping Border Force and police staff with the powers needed to ensure people arriving in England conform to the new rules.

Border Force have the power to issue fixed penalty notices to individuals suspected of lying on their [passenger locator form](#) and where necessary detain them for up to 3 hours.

As part of the regulations, a requirement for quarantining individuals to self-isolate in their room is set out in law. There will be also be a visible security presence at the managed quarantine facilities to ensure that people are obeying these rules.

The government has struck deals with 16 hotels so far, providing 4,963 rooms for the new quarantine system, with a further 58,000 rooms currently on standby.

All hotel staff will be fully trained in COVID-secure practices, and all contractors have been instructed to ensure their facilities and services are provided in a COVID-secure way. This includes plastic shields and PPE where necessary.

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UK's support to global vaccine facility Covax will help Pakistan's COVID-19 vaccination programme

So far, the UK has committed £548m to the global Covax initiative, making the UK the largest single donor. The Covax initiative is the key way that more than 180 countries will have fair, early access to COVID-19 vaccines. The UK has also encouraged other countries to contribute over \$1bn to Covax. Through the Covax facility, Pakistan will take delivery of 17m doses of the UK-developed Oxford University-Astra-Zeneca vaccine shortly, with the first 7m expected before April. The next 10m doses will come later, likely before June. This will help protect 8.5m people from the virus, which has already claimed over 12,000 lives in Pakistan.

Overall, Covax – which stands for Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility – has committed to supply Pakistan with vaccines for 45m people this year alone. Covax is an international initiative to support the discovery, manufacture and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines for one billion people by the end of 2021.

British High Commissioner Dr Christian Turner CMG said:

The people of the UK and Pakistan have come together to fight COVID-19.

The Covax facility has been the main way the world has united to make sure all countries get the vaccines they need as quickly as possible, including Pakistan. The UK has been a world leader in supporting Covax, and Covax has committed to supplying Pakistan with COVID-19 vaccines for 45m people this year.

The UK has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Pakistan in pandemic, pivoting around £20m of UK aid to help Pakistan fight the pandemic. This includes funding the World Health Organization (WHO) since April 2020 to build laboratory testing capacity through training and provision of equipment across Pakistan.

The UK has so far pledged up to £1.3 billion of UK aid overall to end the coronavirus pandemic as quickly as possible. This includes up to £829 million for the development and distribution of new vaccines, treatments and tests, and £5 million for other critical COVID-19 research and development.

The UK is also at the forefront of efforts to drive unprecedented global collaboration and resourcing for the development and delivery of new

vaccines, treatments and tests at the speed and scale required. The UK-hosted Global Vaccines Summit on 4 June 2020 raised US\$8.8 billion from 32 donor governments and 12 foundations, corporations and organisations to replenish Global Vaccine Alliance (GAVI) funding over the coming five years. This will help support the delivery of life-saving vaccinations in 68 countries and will be integral to the distribution of a coronavirus vaccine once it is developed.

Notes to editors:

- Covax works towards the development, purchase and delivery of vaccines to more than 180 countries. It was launched in April 2020 and is led by the World Health Organization (WHO), together with the Global Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.
- The UK announced at the United Nations General Assembly in September that it would match every \$4 pledged to Covax by other donors with £1 in UK funding, up to £250 million. Since then, other countries including Canada, Japan and Germany have committed funding to the scheme.
- On 4 January, the UK NHS became the first health service in the world to deploy the life-saving Oxford University-AstraZeneca after meeting strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness. It is the only approved vaccine which can be stored at fridge temperatures.
- Scientists advising the World Health Organization (WHO) have recommended the use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine in all adults – including those aged over 65. The WHO’s strategic advisory group of experts on immunisation has issued interim recommendations on the vaccine, saying the jab could be given to people aged 18 and above “without an upper age limit”.
- Current evidence does not suggest any lack of protection against COVID-19 in people aged 65 or over who receive COVID-19 Oxford University-AstraZeneca. This decision is in line with that made by the European Medicines Agency today, which have authorised COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca in people from 18 years of age – including those aged 65 and above.

For further information

For updates on the British High Commission, please follow our social media channels:

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[New blind cord safety campaign](#)

News story

OPSS is reminding people of the potential dangers of blind cords and loops to children and the steps they can take to reduce the risks.



Working with The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, the Child Accident Prevention Trust, and the British Blind and Shutter Association, OPSS is sharing safety messages on how to keep children safe.

Looped blind cords and chains can strangle children and young people. Although changes to standards for blinds in 2014 have led to improved product safety, products installed earlier may not have these safety features and millions of households could be affected.

New blinds with looped cords must have child safety devices installed at the point of manufacture or be sold with the blind.

OPSS and its partners have produced the safety tips below to help make homes safer.

Fit a tidy, tensioner or a cleat

Tidies and tensioner should be firmly fixed to an adjoining surface to ensure that the cord or chain is permanently held tight. Cleats should be positioned out of children's reach on an adjacent surface that is at least 1.5 metres from the floor. After blind use, cords should be fastened up in a figure of eight making sure all the spare cord is secured on the cleat.

Move furniture away from windows

Children love to climb so keep furniture away from blinds. This includes cots, beds, highchairs, and play pens.

The campaign materials can be downloaded from the [consumer safety awareness campaigns materials GOV.UK page](#). The safety information campaign can be supported through retweets or sending out these important messages using the hashtag #blindcordsafety.

For more information and advice, go to:

[The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents](#)

[Chartered Trading Standards Institute](#)

[Child Accident Prevention Trust](#)

[The British Blind and Shutter Association](#)

Published 15 February 2021