

UN Human Rights Council 50: UK statement during panel discussion on COVID-19

World news story

The UK delivered a statement during the panel discussion on good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.



Thank you, Mr President,

The United Kingdom welcomes today's discussion.

The UK is committed to unlocking the opportunities provided by existing and emerging digital technologies. If developed responsibly and with the necessary safeguards in place, new technologies can enable major advances in tackling global and social challenges – from pandemic preparedness to enhancing a quality education for all.

Alongside digital technologies, the UK recognises the importance of a free, open, inclusive and interoperable Internet to enable individuals to enjoy their human rights, exercise their fundamental freedoms and hold governments

to account.

We here today must take steps to tackle digital divides, to ensure that no one is left behind in a digital world. Working through digital development interventions like our Digital Access Programme, the UK supports inclusive, affordable, safe and secure digital connectivity and digital skills development. We promote sustainable models for individuals from underserved and marginalised groups to realise their economic, social, civil and political rights online.

The benefits of technological innovation should extend to all people, with governments, industry or individuals working together to make them a reality. New technologies and their governance arrangements must be developed responsibly, in compliance with international human rights law, and supported by multi-stakeholder engagement.

Mr President,

What more can be done to ensure greater and more sustainable access to digital technologies so that more people may benefit?

Published 28 June 2022

[UN Human Rights Council 50: UK statement during Interactive Dialogue on trafficking in persons](#)

World news story

The UK delivered a statement during the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons.



UK Government

Thank you Mr President.

The United Kingdom would like to thank the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons for her continued work and welcomes ongoing discussion on this crucial issue.

We are grateful for the Special Rapporteur's latest report and we support her assertion that we must address the increase in child labour and significant risks of trafficking. During our G7 Presidency, we committed to work collaboratively to eradicate forced labour, protect victims and improve transparency in global supply chains. More recently, the UK pledged our support at the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour and we are committed to taking forward priorities including working with businesses to eliminate child labour in global supply chains.

We expect all UK businesses to behave in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and to comply with all applicable laws and meet their obligations through the UK Modern Slavery Act. This includes their management of supply chains in the UK and overseas.

Special Rapporteur Mullally,

What further steps can the international community take to accelerate progress towards SDG 8.7 to eliminate child labour?

Thank you.

[New UK package offers a lifeline to Ukrainian researchers and entrepreneurs](#)

- Quadrupling of funding to 'Researchers at Risk' scheme will help best and brightest Ukrainian scientists & other researchers to continue their work in the UK
- UK universities and institutions have come forward in droves to support their Ukrainian counterparts, backed by UK Government initiatives and funding
- Science & technology sector will be a crucial component of helping sustain and rebuild the Ukrainian economy while increasing partnerships which also create jobs in the UK

The Prime Minister has announced a series of measures to support Ukraine's Science & Technology and research sectors, as part of the UK's wider efforts to bolster Ukraine's economy and security in the face of Russia's brutality.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine was a regional Science & Technology powerhouse. The technology sector accounted for 4% of the country's GDP and Ukraine was home to around 5,000 IT companies and 285,000 IT specialists.

Science and Technology has already played a role in boosting Ukraine's war effort unlike any ever seen before. From international crypto donations to companies like Uber and AirBnB using their platforms to help to those forced to flee violence.

The sector will also be vital to Ukraine's long-term resilience and recovery. It will be a platform on which Ukraine rebounds – providing jobs, attracting investment and developing next-generation technology. As a science superpower, the UK hosts some of the world's most important technology companies. There is huge scope for world-leading UK companies to partner with Ukrainian ones – creating and sustaining jobs and investment in both our countries for generations to come.

The package of measures announced by the Prime Minister today (Tuesday 28th

June) will give Ukraine's best scientists and tech entrepreneurs the help they need to rebuild their country. They will be enhanced and supported by the leadership and generosity of UK organisations, many of which have already offered extensive assistance to their Ukrainian counterparts.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The people of Ukraine have had to sacrifice so much at the hands of Putin's barbarism. But I remain utterly dedicated to ensuring a future in which, together, the Ukraine and the UK thrive.

People across the UK have opened their hearts and their homes to support those fleeing violence in Ukraine, and our world-leading universities, research institutions and tech businesses are no different.

Science and technology will be decisive in ensuring Putin fails in Ukraine, and it will be crucial as we rebuild the Ukrainian economy. The UK will be with our Ukrainian friends every step of the way.

And to the Russian scientists and researchers who are looking upon Putin's violence in dismay, and who no longer feel safe in Russia: you should feel free to apply to come to the UK and work in a country that values openness, freedom and the pursuit of knowledge.

More than 130 Ukrainian academics will be brought to, and supported in, the UK under the 'Researchers at Risk' programme which launched in March. £3 million was initially allocated to the programme and a further £9.8 million announced today will allow it to expand significantly to meet demand.

The Researchers at Risk scheme enables Ukrainian academics to continue their research at UK institutions, whether they are fleeing the conflict or already in the UK and unable to return home. The Fellowships provide a salary, research and living costs for up to two years for these researchers, helping Ukraine to preserve its research ecosystem. They can then return to Ukraine to help rebuild the country and ensure it prospers.

Serhii Shkarlet, Ukrainian Minister for Science and Education said:

We appreciate greatly the decision of the UK Government to expand the Researchers at Risk Fellowship Programme, which has already received a £3 million aid package.

Thanks to the support of the United Kingdom, Ukrainian scientists who were forced to flee abroad due to Russian aggression will be able to continue their research and share their experience with foreign colleagues. Equally important is the support of Ukrainian universities, which thanks to the new UK twinning programme will be able to cooperate with leading universities in the UK.

I believe that such collaboration will strengthen significantly the cooperation between our countries in the field of education and science.

The UK Government will also provide funding to support the Universities UK International and the Cormack Consultancy Group twinning programme between UK and Ukrainian academic institutions. The project aims to establish more than 100 long-term, sustainable partnerships to support Ukrainian institutions, students and researchers during the current conflict and beyond.

79 UK universities have already signed up to the scheme, including the University of Edinburgh which has linked up with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and Wrexham Glyndwr University which has twinned with Chernihiv Polytechnic National University – extending the existing relationship between the two towns.

The nature of the support universities will provide is tailored to the needs of Ukrainian institutions. The University of Liverpool, for example, is providing access to extensive online learning materials across a range of subjects, as well as electronic library access and free places on summer schools.

A further 61 Ukrainian universities are looking to partner with UK institutions and there is international interest in the scheme in Ireland, the USA, Canada and across Europe.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Director of Universities UK International said:

We are delighted that the government is putting its weight behind this extraordinary scheme, through which 79 UK universities have paired up with Ukrainian universities to help them to continue to operate, helping them teach remotely, hosting their staff and students on UK campuses, providing library access and equipment, and supporting the continuation of Ukrainian research activity.

These are significant and long-term commitments, and the solidarity shown between universities in the UK and Ukraine has been remarkable and inspiring to witness.

Finally, to help those Ukrainian Science & Tech business leaders who have been temporarily forced to move operations by the Russian invasion, the Department for International Trade will increase efforts in Ukraine under its Global Entrepreneur Programme (GEP). The programme aims to offer temporary relocation, mentorship and connections with UK industry to entrepreneurs who relocate to the UK. The GEP supports entrepreneurs in Ukraine from its hub in Poland.

Since Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the UK Government has announced a number of measures, alongside the S&T sector, to support Ukrainian researchers and entrepreneurs.

In addition to the Researchers at Risk Fellowship Programme, which has been expanded today, UK Research and Innovation is prioritising Global Talent visa endorsement applications from Ukrainian national researchers, technologists, and other specialists.

The UK Government is working closely with the UK tech industry to support efforts to help Ukraine rebuild and rebound from Putin's war. This includes supporting the proposal to hold a 'Re.Build' conference. The conference, organised by the Founders Forum, will help ensure the most innovative technology companies in the UK and around the world contribute to the Ukrainian recovery effort in the most effective way.

[Leaseholders protected from unfair cladding costs as government's building safety reforms come into force](#)

- Leaseholders protected for the first time by new laws which prevent building safety bills for dangerous cladding being sent their way
- Secretary of State writes to freeholders setting out their new legal responsibilities and makes clear there will be consequences if they do not comply
- Government to provide indemnity for building risk safety assessors to restore a proportionate, common sense approach

Many leaseholders will for the first time be legally protected from unfair bills to make their homes safe as measures in the Building Safety Act 2022 come into force today (28 June 2022).

Those responsible for historical safety defects, and those who own buildings, will instead be required to fund essential repairs.

Some developers are already stepping up and doing the right thing, 45 of the UK's biggest homebuilders have agreed to fix life-critical fire-safety defects on all buildings 11 metres+ that they have played a role in developing or refurbishing in the last 30 years.

Stronger measures in the act include new powers for the Secretary of State to

restrict irresponsible developers' ability to build new homes, an extension of the Building Safety levy worth an estimated £3 billion and improving building owners' rights to launch legal action against developers.

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove said:

"Today marks a major turning point for building safety in this country, as we introduce a tough new regime to make homes safe and help rid the sector of bad practice once and for all.

"Hundreds of thousands of innocent leaseholders now have the legal protection they rightly deserve, freeing them from a financial burden they should never have faced.

"I'm pleased that most of the largest developers have agreed to play their part in solving this.

"But there is more to do – we are focusing intensively on work with lenders to unlock the mortgage market and empower leaseholders to take their next step on the property ladder, and we will remain vigilant if anyone fails to act on the pledges they have made."

To mark this important development, the Secretary of State has [written to freeholders](#) and made clear that the days of leaseholders being faced with large invoices for building safety repairs are now over. The letter reminds freeholders that qualifying leaseholders now have protections in law from costs and that they will be acting illegally if they attempt to circumvent them.

The letter also reminds them of their new responsibilities as part of the Act, including ensuring buildings have updated fire risk assessments that reflect the latest guidance on proportionality.

Where freeholders or owners of buildings over 18m with cladding related issues do not have clear plans to address these issues, they must have full assessments ready to submit to the Building Safety Fund, which will reopen for new applications shortly, helping to ensure applications can be handled in good time, reducing the disruption and stress to leaseholders.

They must inform and consult leaseholders throughout. If they do not do these things, responsible authorities now have the legal powers to compel them to remediate their buildings, and to ensure that they meet the costs.

Alongside this, the government has signed contracts for a new Professional Insurance Indemnity Scheme. This will help assessors conduct EWS1 assessments to identify whether buildings have fire safety risks, ensuring professionals can make sensible decisions and restoring common sense and proportionality to the market.

The following measures from the Act have been prioritised to ensure leaseholders are protected and will come into force from today:

Leaseholder protections

For the first time, qualifying leaseholders living in buildings above 11 metres tall or with at least 5 storeys will be legally protected from extortionate building safety costs:

- Qualifying leaseholders (those living in their own homes, or with up to 3 UK properties in total) will be protected, in full, from the costs associated with the remediation of unsafe cladding. They will also have robust and far-reaching protections from the costs associated with non-cladding defects, including interim measures like waking watches.
- It will be illegal for freeholders to pass on the cost of historical building repair works or the removal of cladding to any of their leaseholders, including non-qualifying leaseholders, if they are or are linked to the building's developer.
- It will be illegal for freeholders to pass on any historical building safety costs to qualifying leaseholders if they pass the wealth test set out in law.
- Where a developer cannot be held responsible and the building owner is not required to meet the costs in full, leaseholders with non-cladding related issues will also be protected by a cap on how much they can pay for these costs. The cap will only apply to non-cladding related work for those whose property is valued at more than £325,000 (London) and £175,000 outside London (owners of properties below this ceiling will pay nothing). Where leaseholders have bought through shared ownership, their cap will reflect their share of ownership in the property.
- Any costs that are not recoverable from leaseholders will need to be met by building owners and landlords.
- Buyers of new build homes will be able to hold their developer responsible for safety and quality issues under a new scheme from the New Homes Ombudsman.

Other measures in the act include:

Making industry pay

- New powers for the Secretary of State to restrict irresponsible developers' ability to build new homes, including if they refuse to take responsibility for fixing life-critical fire safety defects on all buildings 11 metres+ that they have played a role in developing or

refurbishing in the last 30 years.

- Extending the Building Safety Levy to be charged on all new residential buildings. Expected to raise an estimated £3 billion over 10 years, this will fund a new government scheme to pay for the removal of unsafe cladding on buildings of 11-18m where the developer cannot be traced or has failed to agree to cover the costs upfront.
- Enhanced civil liabilities for building owners, enabling them to launch legal action against developers, contractors and manufacturers for shoddy construction works and defective products which have caused homes to be uninhabitable in the past 30 years.
- Extra powers for the courts in England and Wales to go after associated companies. This means businesses who have hidden behind shadowy shell companies within their corporate structures can now be pursued to pay.
- These new laws will allow the government to consider appropriate action to pursue these companies as part of a new Recovery Unit that is based in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Improving building standards and restoring common sense

Tough, new regulations for the industry will enforce a higher quality of building standards – ensuring homes are made safer and that a proportionate approach is taken to safety:

- A new Building Safety Regulator – overseen by the Health & Safety Executive – will enforce a new, more stringent regulatory regime on the safety and performance of [high-rise buildings in scope](#), in England. It will also consult and respond to safety concerns raised by residents through a new Residents' Panel.
 - A National Regulator for Construction Products will implement stronger standards on construction manufacturers in the UK. Part of the Office for Product Safety and Standards, this new regulator will conduct vital market surveillance to spot and remove unsafe materials faster, as well as confront poor practice by taking action against those that break the rules.
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Report shows progress in boosting investment in UK's women entrepreneurs

- 160 lenders and investors are now signed up to a government-industry code helping women entrepreneurs access the finance they need to succeed
- code signatories have been backing women-led businesses, including significantly more venture capital deals in firms with female founders
- government encourages even more lenders and investors to sign up to the code to further support women-led businesses

A new [report published today](#) (Tuesday 28 June) reveals the strength of investment in the UK's women entrepreneurs by lenders and investors signed up to the Investing in Women Code, a world-leading commitment to improve access to finance for women-led businesses.

The Investing in Women Code is an initiative recommended by the government-commissioned [Rose Review](#), led by NatWest CEO Alison Rose, into how best to boost female entrepreneurship. The code sets out commitments to support the advancement of women entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom by improving their access to the tools, resources and finance they need to achieve their goals.

Signatories to the code include Angel investment groups, venture and growth investors and High Street banks including Barclays, NatWest and Santander.

The report is the second-ever annual report on the code and key findings include:

- in 2021, 34% of venture capital deals made by code signatories were in companies with at least one female founder, compared to an industry average of 24%
- in 2021, the average amount of Angel (early-stage) investment being sought by all-female teams (£791k) was very similar to all-male teams (£823k). This is a significant and encouraging change from 2020, when all-female teams requested less than 50% of the amounts requested by male-only teams
- the number of code signatories has now reached 160, with a notable increase in the number of venture and growth capital firms joining, accounting for 34 of the 53 new signatories in the year to 31 March 2022

While there is more work to be done, the code is gaining recognition worldwide. A partnership between 14 countries including Australia, Canada and China, the World Bank and 6 regional development banks is planning to draw on the UK's experience to create a 'Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code' to help the 400 million businesses owned by women around the world.

Small Business Minister Paul Scully said:

Growing the economy is the long-term way of addressing the cost of

living and up to £250 billion could be added to the economy if we break the barriers to women starting and scaling new businesses at the same rate as men.

Significant progress is being made but there will be more to do in the time ahead, so I'm looking forward to working with businesses to ensure all entrepreneurs are able to make the most of their talents and I encourage more lenders and investors to sign up to the code.

British Business Bank CEO Catherine Lewis La Torre said:

There are structural factors at play that hold women back when they are looking for finance. However, we also know that diversity is good for business and that's why, as the UK's economic development bank, the British Business Bank aims to break down barriers by improving access to finance for all entrepreneurs.

As a founding signatory of the Investing in Women Code, we have focused our efforts on increasing the number of venture capital firms becoming signatories as access to venture capital can be particularly challenging for female founders. While I'm particularly proud of the 105 venture capital firms that have signed the code alongside other finance providers, there is more to do to drive action and I look forward to continuing this vital work to promote and support female talent.

Stephen Pegge, Managing Director, Commercial Finance, UK Finance, said:

The banking and finance industry is committed to supporting women entrepreneurs through the provision of finance, guidance and services to address the untapped potential in the UK. Women-led businesses have been driving vital innovation and growth up and down the country and this report demonstrates that progress is being made through the collective effort of the sector with investors, business networks and the government.

It is important that all customers feel confident in applying for finance and so it is encouraging that the report shows 9 in 10 women-led businesses are successful in their applications.

Jenny Tooth OBE, Executive Chair of the UK Business Angels Association, said:

Addressing the barriers for women-led businesses in accessing Angel and early stage investment is a key priority for our work at UKBAA. As one of the partners for the code, it has been encouraging to see an increasing number of our Angel community signing up to this

important commitment and taking actions to create change.

Significantly, we are also seeing the impact of Angel groups with an increased proportion of women investors on the number of female founders seeking and achieving investment. We know there is more to be done and we will be working to attract many more Angel investors to sign the code in the year ahead.

Gurpreet Manku, BVCA Deputy Director General and Director of Policy, said:

The venture and growth capital community recognises that it needs to work together to improve the levels of funding going to diverse founders. Increasing transparency and access to venture and growth capital investors is key to this and it was great to see more firms sign up to the code this year.

Our ambition is to increase the number of signatories further and continue to highlight best practices and actions that work.

The government and the Investing in Women Code partners have agreed 3 priorities for the future:

- further increasing the number of code signatories, including by expanding the information available online for prospective signatories
- showcasing the actions being adopted by signatories and promoting best practices to support women entrepreneurs, including by holding forums to share best practices and engage with women-led businesses
- refining data collection and analysis, including assessing what additional metrics to collect. This includes working with the Rose Review board to further improve our understanding of the finance market more widely and the challenges faced by women-led businesses

The report builds on the announcement last month that a new 'Taskforce on Women-Led High-Growth Enterprises' will support women entrepreneurs, tackle investing barriers, and increase the number of women-led fast-growing businesses. The taskforce will influence high growth investors, the wider business community, and raise the aspirations of the next generation of female entrepreneurs. The first meeting of the taskforce is expected to be this week.

A diverse and inclusive business ecosystem is good for customers, entrepreneurs, businesses, investors, and society. BEIS, together with the Investing in Women Code partners and signatory firms share a commitment to work in partnership to make the UK one of the most attractive countries in the world to start and grow a business by advancing female entrepreneurship.

The government is continuing to back UK businesses and livelihoods, including through the Help to Grow Management and Digital schemes, increasing the Employment Allowance and slashing fuel duty.

Organisations are eligible to become code signatories if they provide debt or equity finance to businesses. Examples include banks and non-bank lenders, venture capital funds, private equity firms, Angel consortia, crowdfunding platforms, and public sector providers.

BEIS welcomes interest in the Investing in Women Code from all eligible organisations. Further information about the code and an online sign up form is available on the [British Business Bank's website](#).