

UN Economic and Social Council: UK statement on health care during COVID-19

Thank you chair and panellists for your insightful comments and for the immediate relevance of this discussion.

Whilst the spread of COVID-19 is first and foremost a health crisis, we must not lose sight of the inevitable humanitarian, protection and development crises that follow an upsurge in cases in fragile settings. The UK welcomes the focus of this panel on the protection implications of the pandemic, in all its aspects.

Earlier this month, the UK brought together humanitarian and health leaders to discuss the specific challenges associated with delivering and administering vaccines to the world's most vulnerable communities. Representatives made clear the importance of engaging meaningfully with communities and in monitoring protection risks. A renewed energy is needed, and in this context, a focus on the intersections of the principles of accountability to affected people, adherence to International Humanitarian Law and on risk communication.

We also need to continue to press for humanitarian access in conflict affected contexts to ensure vaccines and wider humanitarian aid reach some of those most in need. In January this year, under the UK presidency of the UNSC, UNSCR 2565 was adopted to ensure appropriate access for health and humanitarian workers to areas of conflict, to pave the way for vaccine delivery and ensure their safety, wellbeing and protection, in alignment with UNSCR 2286. The UK continues to advocate for vaccine delivery to be part of a multi-sectoral, principled, and needs-based humanitarian strategy. The vaccine must also reach the estimated 70-80 million people in areas controlled by non-state armed groups.

However, as the centre of gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic now shifts to the poorest, unvaccinated countries, our attention must also turn towards system-wide readiness and contingency planning, including resolving indemnity issues, and to address protection concerns. We must be ready to get vaccines into arms once they arrive on the tarmac.

Learning from last year's COVID-19 response – particularly as regards the specific groups in vulnerable and hard to reach settings, such as refugees, internally displaced people and host communities, migrants, women and girls and the elderly – is becoming increasingly important. The UK welcomes the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the COVID-19 response and encourages findings to be shared regularly so that they can be applied in real-time, if necessary.

Finally, I can assure you the UK remains fully engaged on this response and

as others have made significant contributions. We also commend all agencies and staff working and delivering in very challenging environments during the pandemic.