

**Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme (83rd meeting)
Remarks by Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations
Geneva, 8 March 2022**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you, Mister Chair,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Deputy High Commissioner just pointed out, as we meet today the world is witnessing the fastest refugee flight in recent history, with over 1.9 million people in just 12 days. Millions more are affected inside Ukraine, including those unable to flee.

We are unfortunately seeing – once more – the tragic images of women, children and the elderly fleeing – sometimes with just the clothes they have on - hoping that they will soon be able to return. Host communities in neighboring countries and their Governments are showing extraordinary solidarity – as we often see all around the world in such situations.

Alongside the Ukrainians, are citizens from other countries who were residing in Ukraine – many of them students who had come to acquire new skills. We have received disturbing reports of some of them being unable to find a way out of the country, prevented from boarding trains or harassed at borders. Governments have reaffirmed that all those fleeing would be received without any discrimination and pledged to take all the necessary measures to address such situations. We are also working closely with colleagues from the International Organization for Migration and NGO partners to respond to distress calls and provide the necessary assistance when we are informed of such incidents.

Pascale Moreau, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe, has just returned from a visit to Romania, Moldova and Poland with High Commissioner Grandi. She will provide you with a detailed update on the unfolding situation and on our response in Ukraine as well as in neighboring countries.

Mister Chair,

The dramatic situation in Ukraine should not let us forget that we are now in the third year of the COVID pandemic. Globally, its consequences continue to disproportionately affect forcibly displaced people.

Efforts have been made all over the world, and most of all in low- and middle-income countries – which host 86% of the world's refugees – to ensure that they are included in the health response. In 2021, we received additional resources to support the response of host Governments through the provision of Personal Protective Equipment, the scaling up of laboratory testing and the setting up of quarantine and treatment centers. Moving forward, the challenges will be to maintain this support and ensure access to vaccines – which remain the most effective response to the pandemic. Here, there are some good and some less good news.

The good news is that in 2021, 162 countries included refugees in their national vaccine plans. As of last week, 8.36 million vaccine doses were distributed to some 4.79 million refugees and other forcibly displaced people in 66 countries. An additional 72 countries confirmed they had started vaccinating refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

The less good news is the disparity in vaccine access. Less than 5% of adults are fully vaccinated in low-income countries, compared to about 58% in advanced economies. We cannot advocate enough for the inclusion of the people we serve in national vaccination plans, because – as the WHO so clearly puts it – “no one is safe until everyone is safe”.

The socio-economic consequences of the pandemic on IDPs and refugees have been severe. Here, allow me to single out the plight of all those living in urban settings and working in the informal sector. While in some countries citizens received social assistance to counter the impact of lockdowns on their ability to make ends meet, refugees rarely did. As the economies of the countries that welcomed them are slowly recovering, they may be left behind, unable to ever recover from the shock they experienced.

A key lesson learned from the pandemic is, therefore, the crucial importance of ensuring that refugees have the right to work in the formal sector and can contribute – through taxes or other social contributions – to the safety nets they may one day require. Inclusion in national systems is a key strategy to address the needs of displaced populations in a more predictable manner and to promote their self-reliance.

Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

As you will hear in more detail from my colleagues, our collaboration with development actors – a key component of the Global Compact on Refugees – has been significantly strengthened in the past 2 years.

Since it was introduced, the World Bank’s IDA Window for Host Communities and Refugees brought some 2.46 billion dollars additional resources to create medium- to long-term development opportunities for both refugees and their host communities.

We have also further strengthened our engagement with bilateral development partners such as Japan, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark. We are working closely with the EU’s Directorate General for International Partnerships to ensure that multi-year regional programmes targeting areas hosting refugees across Africa translate into progress towards solutions.

More will be said about the strong partnerships we also enjoy with regional international financial institutions such as the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank. The Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions will also speak of the ongoing collaboration with UNDP and the ILO. Allow me to mention here the Blueprint initiative we are implementing with UNICEF, which aims at greater inclusion of refugees in Government services, education being a key priority.

We are also working closely with the World Food Programme to address chronic shortfalls in humanitarian food assistance by investing in food production in refugee contexts, where it is possible. That said, I cannot overstate the importance of maintaining strong support to humanitarian food assistance including through the provision of cash.

UNHCR recognizes the importance of expanding opportunities for refugee livelihoods, self-reliance and inclusion and is working with governments and an expanding range of actors. Refugee and IDP self-reliance can only be truly realized by supporting market linkages, private sector partnerships, entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities. It is in this context that we initiated a collaboration with the International Finance Corporation. It builds on ongoing efforts by teams around the world and aims at creating a Joint Initiative that will enable both institutions to harness each other’s comparative advantage and develop an integrated approach to private sector solutions for forced displacement. We aim to officially launch this initiative at the end of the 3rd quarter of this year.

Chairperson,

As the situation in Ukraine attests, it is essential that we maintain a strong emergency response capacity and effective staff safety management systems. We have in the past few years had to make an increasing number of emergency declarations. 40 last year as compared to 30 in 2020 and 12 in 2019. Our preparedness and response through deployable staff and supply capacity remains strong as we respond to emergencies in various parts of the world, including in the Northern part of Ethiopia, Sudan, the Sahel, Yemen, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad and Cameroon. We value the contribution of our 20 NGO stand-by partners who continue to provide vital additional capacity in emergencies. The risk of gender-based violence is particularly high in such emergency humanitarian contexts. Prevention and risk mitigation across all sectors is therefore an institutional priority for us in our response.

Climate change is among the defining crises of our time, with a particularly devastating impact on the forcibly displaced and their hosts - who often live on the frontlines of the climate crisis and its interplay with conflict. At the same time, humanitarian operations often take more of a toll on the environment than they should, with the purchase, delivery, use and disposal of core relief items.

It is against this backdrop that, as you will remember, we launched our first Operational Strategy for Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability at the High-Level Officials Meeting, centered around the areas of preparedness, response and supply. In line with SDG7, we also remain committed to achieving the Clean Energy Challenge, a collective effort by individuals, governments, businesses and organisations worldwide to provide clean and modern energy sources to power households, schools, clinics and humanitarian operations by 2030. We are also working with partners to expand opportunities for climate-smart, environmentally friendly and innovative agriculture opportunities, addressing climate, environment and food insecurity simultaneously.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

We continue to implement the IDP policy launched in September 2019 aimed at a consistent, predictable and sustainable engagement in situations of internal displacement, assuming both coordination and operational delivery roles in the areas of protection, shelter, camp coordination and management. We are preparing a report on the progress and challenges encountered as well as an independent evaluation later in the year.

We have been supporting the work of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and have welcomed its focus on solutions which we believe has thus far been lacking in the response to internal displacement.

UNHCR stands behind the Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and thanks States for their support. As a Steering Group agency, we are committed to contributing to solutions for IDPs in close partnership with affected States. We are particularly keen to contribute our 'refugee solutions' related experience to the IDP context, including through facilitation of development financing, consultations with IDP communities and others – all aimed towards ensuring protection in the context of solutions.

Finally, I would like to express appreciation for the protection and assistance provided to refugees, internally displaced people and others that we serve around the world as well as for the political and financial support we receive at a time when the needs continue to increase. We look forward to your interventions in response to the Directors' presentations on their respective situational contexts and the progress they are making in achieving the Organization's Global Strategic Priorities.

Thank you.