

 Permanent
Mission
of Austria

to the United
Nations in Geneva

111th Session of the IOM Council
Geneva, 24–27 November 2020

Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Robert MÜLLER

*Deputy Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations Office
and Specialised Institutions in Geneva*

G e n e r a l d e b a t e

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the outset, let me express Austria's most sincere appreciation and gratitude to all IOM staff in the field and at headquarters for their relentless dedication and hard work in often difficult and dangerous operating environments. I equally want to thank Director General António Vitorino and Deputy Director General Laura Thompson for their excellent and inspiring leadership.

Austria aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Mr. Chair,

Austria remains deeply concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on migrants, in particular its socio-economic consequences on their livelihoods, the uncertainties accompanying global migration and human mobility and the situation of migrants living in camps or camp like shelters, often in distressing humanitarian settings. In particular, we are alarmed by the number of estimated three million stranded migrants worldwide and the challenges faced by those intending to return to their countries of origin, including lack of programmes and frameworks, as well as discrimination and stigmatisation in their current locations.

We highly appreciate IOM's swift reaction by investing in water supply, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, access to primary health care and camp management in sites with a high population density. We also commend IOM for its activities in providing virtual counselling to migrants throughout the pandemic, building health capacity and infrastructure, undertaking vaccination activities in over 80 countries and conducting health screenings and checks for migrants in order to enable cross-border work.

Mr. Chair,

Together with our partners, we continue to pursue a holistic approach to migration. We believe that no country can address migration on its own. We see the New EU Pact on Migration and Asylum as a unique opportunity and solid basis for the EU to move towards a comprehensive, more predictable and better functioning migration and asylum policy in Europe. In this regard, we attach high importance to the areas of cooperation with third countries, especially countries of origin, first reception and transit, the prevention of irregular migration and the facilitation of safe, humane and dignified return and reintegration.

Cooperation with third states shall focus stronger on creating sustainable living conditions, perspectives and protection in regions of origin of migrants as well as on supporting our neighbours in preventing and combatting migrant smuggling and human trafficking. In order for the EU migration policy to be supported by EU Member States and their populations, inner security, our common values and the European life model have to be respected. In facilitating the integration and inclusion of migrants in Europe, it is essential to advocate democracy, openness and strengthening social cohesion.

Mr. Chair,

Our Federal Government, which has taken up its work at the beginning of this year, has committed itself to elaborate a comprehensive migration strategy, which is based on a clear distinction between migration and asylum. The strategy will, amongst other issues, focus on the external dimension of migration management and provide measures to ensure safe, orderly, regular and qualified migration in the interest of both our receiving communities and migrants.

Inter alia, it will contain the following elements:

- further developing the “Red White Red” card in order to enable immigration of needed skilled people to Austria;
- gradually digitalising our residence permit proceedings with the possibility of online filing of applications;
- accepting also English documents and correspondence in the proceedings;
- creating a digital platform to ensure transparency on each administrative step; and
- shortening the duration of proceedings, accompanied by the establishment of a monitoring system aimed at the swift issuance of decisions.

Mr. Chair,

Let me use this opportunity to personally thank Ambassador Morten Jespersen for facilitating and skilfully steering the process on the reform to strengthen IOM’s senior leadership, which could be successfully concluded at the Special Session of the Council last month. I also want to thank Deputy Director General Laura Thompson for her dedication and preparedness to remain in office during this time.

Finally, let me thank IOM for our excellent bilateral cooperation, especially in the field of voluntary return and reintegration. We are proud to host and substantially support IOM’s Country Office as well as the Regional Office for Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia in Vienna. We continue to support IOM as the leading UN agency on migration. We are looking forward to continue our cooperation and wish you all the best for the upcoming year.

Thank you very much.