

STATEMENT
by
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High-level segment

The impact of COVID-19 on borders, migration and mobility: learning lessons and preparing for the future

(Geneva, November 29, 2021)

Chairperson,
Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Armenian Government, I would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations on the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the International Organization for Migration. Since 1993, when the Republic of Armenia has joined IOM as a Member State, various initiatives and projects implemented by the organization had significant impact on migration management and sustainable development in our country.

We highly appreciate the IOM support to migration policy development of Armenia in line with the objectives of Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The first national voluntary review on GCM implementation was prepared and submitted by Armenia in 2020 (with IOM support). Armenia is committed to prepare the voluntary report on GCM implementation in 2021 before the foreseen International Migration Review Forum (IMRF).

Madam Chair,

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has been severely affecting the economies of states around the world, as well as their education, transport systems, tourism, agriculture, consumer markets and other sectors. However, the impact of covid on the mobility of people was the most obvious and severe.

Last year was very challenging for Armenia conditioned not only by Covid-19 pandemic, but also by the war unleashed against Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan, which threatened not only global peace and security, but also led to a regional humanitarian crisis, and mass displacement.

Gross violations of human rights, including in armed conflicts, are among multiple and complex factors leading to forced displacement of people. As a result of this aggression more than 91.000 Armenians were displaced from their homes, 88 % of whom were women and children. These people had to leave their homes to escape mass atrocities.

More than 40,000 people were deprived of their homes and property, vital infrastructure was destroyed, including schools and hospitals. Many of those people have become victims of repeated forced displacement, since they first had fled ethnic cleansing committed by Azerbaijan in the 1990s. During the recent aggression these people were displaced again, while still facing the consequences of the humanitarian crisis. The accommodation for displaced population remains among the most pressing issues.

Madam Chair,

Despite all the challenges that our country faces, Armenia provides full accesses to Covid-19 vaccination to all migrants, refugees and displaced people residing in the country. Also, from the very beginning of the pandemic, the Government took steps to organize the return of over 40,000 Armenian citizens. Moreover, in 2020, the Armenian Government has also adopted the state program to support the reintegration of citizens returning to Armenia (including forced returnees).

Due to Covid, seasonal labour migrants were not able to leave for their host countries because of severe travel restrictions on one hand, and long-term migrants were not being able to send remittances to Armenia because of lockdowns and quarantine restrictions on the other hand.

In this area we have extensively cooperated with our international partners, including IOM. With the help of our colleagues, we have delivered access to life-saving primary health care services, by providing 10000 consultations to conflict-affected persons through the deployment of two multidisciplinary teams reaching 120 displacement locations across the country. Referrals to higher-level of healthcare and specialized services were provided to more than 3000 beneficiaries. Furthermore, overall, 13000 displaced people were provided with hygiene kits covering 4 regions of Armenia.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic also pushed and motivated us to accelerate the digitalization of migration management systems in Armenia, particularly the work permit system for foreigners, introduce new approaches in providing various services to migrants and refugees.

Madam Chair,

Covid -19 yet again revealed the urgency for clear commitments, systematic and transformative responses to the plea of the most vulnerable populations. Recent experience also demonstrated efficiency of inclusive policies, ones that build on cooperative models between Governments, international partners, civil society and other stakeholders. As our country continues to cope with the pandemic and security threats, we reiterate our full commitment to multilateral efforts and human-rights based on solutions to growing humanitarian challenges at regional and global level.

Madam Chair,

We would like to conclude by congratulating again on this anniversary and expressing appreciation for your partnership. We wish IOM continued successful endeavors for many more years to come.

Thank you.