

**STATEMENT BY H. E. Mr. TODOR CHUROV
DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BULGARIA**

112th Session of the Council,

IOM's 70th anniversary

High-level segment

29 November 2021, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., Room XIX, Palais des Nations, Geneva

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

Chair,

Director General,

Excellences, distinguished delegates,

It is my honour to address the high-level segment, convened on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the International Organization for Migration, which, since 1951, has been the leading international organisation in the field of migration.

Through the years, the IOM has been a key partner for the Republic of Bulgaria in the areas of return, reintegration, integration of foreigners and prevention and combating of trafficking in human beings.

The topic of our discussion is both timely and relevant. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on all countries around the world. Such unprecedented situation requires quick response, excellent interaction between the competent national agencies, as well as joint efforts of the international community.

The COVID-19 has reduced dramatically cross-border movements. This effect will continue to influence the life of all countries and citizens, including those, affected by different humanitarian crises. In the initial phase of the pandemic, travel restrictions left millions of people stranded away from their homes. The travel restrictions have slowed down the economy and, at times, the response to the outbreak. The need to address the pandemic sometimes overtakes the attention and assistance to victims of conflict, environmental disasters and other humanitarian crises.

In this context, the Republic of Bulgaria remained dedicated to the health and safety of the migrants. The necessary measures have been taken to minimize the risks for all those involved in operations, procedures and activities, related to migration. My country has included the asylum seekers in the National Vaccination Plan. An awareness-raising campaign on vaccines and vaccination was organised. Information materials and

leaflets, translated into the main languages of the countries of origin, have been provided to the migrants. The vaccines are free of charge, as they are for the Bulgarian citizens. In order to ensure the health of third-country nationals, residing in or travelling through the Republic of Bulgaria, the state institutions applied the same rules and measures, valid for the Bulgarian nationals - medical screening; social distancing; enhanced disinfection; regulated access to closed spaces and, where appropriate, quarantine.

As we have learnt throughout the implementation of the various health measures related to the pandemic, we need to embed the respect for human rights in all our efforts, in order to be successful.

The pandemic should not distract the international community from the persistent challenges in the field of migration that require response. Despite the health and sanitary crisis and the related restrictions, it is necessary to continue the fight against the exploitation of and trafficking in migrants. The IOM should continue to play a central role in this regard, adjusting to the changed circumstances.

The attempts during the recent years to instrumentalise the migration flows for political purposes are a worrisome trend. Such behavior is unacceptable in the international relations and represents a grave violation of the human rights of the migrants.

The right answer to the irregular migration is in the joint efforts of the international community to address the root causes. This common truth has remained valid throughout the pandemic. More than ever, it is evident that the spillover of crises from one country or region to another destabilizes all and limits the chances to achieve security, stability and prosperity. The crises need to be resolved where they are.

In this context, it is necessary to develop new and enhance the existing partnerships with countries that are a source or a transit route of migration, in order to avoid illegal migration, prevent dangerous departures, facilitate return and reintegration, consider the additional risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and create favourable living conditions at home, discouraging precarious migration endeavours.

Furthermore, the full implementation of readmission agreements and arrangements should continue, contributing *inter alia* to the joint efforts of the international community to put under control the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, let me use this opportunity to commend the staff of the IOM for its commitment and dedication in providing support and response worldwide, often in remote and conflict-ridden areas. The efforts of IOM to adapt to the growing challenges and the constantly changing environment are admirable and the Republic of Bulgaria stands ready to continue its excellent, long-standing cooperation with this most important organisation.

Thank you for your attention!