

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES AND FINANCE

Twenty-seventh Session

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

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1. Good morning and welcome. We have the opportunity to reflect on IOM's work at the 111th Council next month, so I will focus this morning on a few key investments and achievements, and make some remarks on the upcoming budget.
2. 2020 continues to be a tumultuous year for all of us. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has impacted all aspects of our lives and upended many of our plans. IOM is no exception. It has made some parts of our work more difficult, particularly on the ground, and has made other parts of our work more urgent, while exacerbating already difficult conditions for millions of people on the move.
3. I would like to thank you for your support to our COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. We have received nearly USD 300 million, which comprises both new and reprogrammed funding. This is a little less than half of the total funding requirements we have outlined. My particular thanks go to Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the European Union for their generous contributions. Your support allowed us to rapidly kick-start our response to the pandemic on the ground in collaboration with migrant communities and stakeholders with whom we were already engaged, as well as engage in new outreach.
4. From the outset, IOM has focused on ensuring we have the fullest picture of the mobility impacts of the pandemic. We have developed a global mobility restrictions database, assessing 4,000 points of entry in 177 countries.
5. We have also worked with authorities and key stakeholders to build their capacities to respond to the pandemic; offered support to front-line workers at points of entry; undertaken joint health assessments with local authorities; and conducted disease surveillance.
6. IOM has prioritized those most at risk and most affected to ensure continued access to basic services, commodities and protection. More than 1,300 IOM health and medical staff have been mobilized to provide health services to vulnerable migrants and displaced persons and strengthen national capacities, including in terms of laboratory testing and disease surveillance at points of entry. We have also offered mental health and psychosocial support in over 25 countries.
7. Our camp coordination and camp management operations have included health actors and authorities to facilitate isolation, physical distancing and, where appropriate, quarantine for mobile populations. Critical protection services have continued as staff found new ways of working remotely in 38 countries.
8. While we have achieved positive results, we also remain deeply concerned by the situation of an estimated 2.75 million stranded migrants worldwide, a conservative estimate of those in need. Funding support for this group remains low and, as a result, only a small fraction of this group has benefited from IOM assistance.
9. We are also deeply aware of looming socioeconomic challenges, in a context where COVID-19 is still inflicting significant immediate costs. We see an urgent need for support mechanisms to maintain resilience and support recovery for mobile populations that were already vulnerable prior to the pandemic. I appeal to you all to include migrants in your programming, wherever possible, both domestically and internationally.

10. IOM, along with the broader United Nations system, is continuing to adjust to a new normal. We have been working closely with United Nations partners on key planning and responses through a number of crisis coordination mechanisms and the IOM-coordinated United Nations Network on Migration. We are flagging issues we see as critical for the United Nations system, including the need to integrate public health concerns into border management processes; ensure comprehensive and inclusive health responses for migrants; and robustly combat racism and xenophobia.

11. COVID-19 has not only required the United Nations to adapt programmes, but also to review and adapt its own internal mechanisms to allow agencies and their staff to “stay and deliver” while strengthening the public health response for the communities they serve. And here I would like to take a moment to praise IOM staff, who have worked tirelessly in the most difficult situations. As I have said before, our people are the heart and soul of this Organization.

12. IOM has been actively supporting the so-called “First Line of Defence” initiative, designed to ensure that United Nations personnel and their dependents have access to high-quality, reliable health services in contexts where health-care systems are under-resourced. IOM is implementing this project in 15 countries, offering a range of services, and is in discussions with United Nations country teams in several other countries regarding the provision of similar services.

13. We continue to work side by side with our key partners. Our partnership with the World Health Organization continues to deepen and we have signed a memorandum of understanding with the Pan American Health Organization to strengthen our response in North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, in the near future, we expect to sign a memorandum of understanding with the GAVI Alliance to promote equitable access to COVID-19 technologies and adequate and timely vaccination coverage for migrants and refugees as vaccines for COVID-19 become available.

14. In view of the challenges we have faced with some technical programmes, such as our visa facilitation work, we have undertaken a number of cost-saving measures. Across the Organization, a number of staff members temporarily moved to part-time work, while around 140 posts were abolished. Many of those staff have since moved back to full-time work as operations have resumed. In spite of these challenges, the Organization’s total workforce continued to grow and stood at 15,300 staff by June 2020.

15. Despite the impact of COVID-19, our long-term plans are continuing to unfold, not least the regarding implementation of the Internal Governance Framework.

16. Since our last meeting of the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance in July, the Internal Governance Framework Workplan has been finalized and shared with Member States. We are very pleased with the level of commitment from Member States for the realization of the reforms. The Deputy Director General and I would like to thank you for your continued support.

17. As you will see from the agenda item on the Internal Governance Framework and the accompanying document (S/27/INF/1) that will be presented during this session, we have made significant progress in a number of areas, including human resources and monitoring and evaluation. As outlined in the document, we will continue to report on our progress at each session of the Standing Committee.

18. The first phase of the Business Transformation process has commenced, and later today you will hear a presentation on our progress and future plans. Business Transformation represents a significant financial investment, totalling an estimated USD 56 million over four years, but is essential to ensure that IOM can continue to be a reliable partner to Member States, donors and beneficiaries in the coming years.

19. In terms of realizing the Strategic Vision 2019–2023, nine regional strategies have been developed and will be launched shortly. Last week, we launched the IOM Continental Strategy for Africa 2020–2024, outlining our core priorities for partnership with the African Union and all regional entities. Our migration data strategy has been finalized, and our priorities for future strategic development are moving forward, including strategies on legal identity and climate and environmental change.

20. Our strategic results framework is in the final stages of elaboration, ready for operationalization in 2021, and we are working to ensure our reporting can incorporate key overarching frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Migration Governance Framework, while also measuring progress against the Strategic Vision.

21. As you well know from our discussions over the past year, I have also sought to adapt the Organization’s structures, starting with a proposed reform to allow for strengthened leadership and management, which will be further discussed tomorrow during the Fourth Special Session of the Council. Irrespective of the outcome of this process, I wish to thank you for your sustained engagement and contributions over the past year.

22. At the same time, we continue to look for ways to strengthen the sustainability of the IOM budget, which will be particularly challenging in a context where needs are greater, and purses strained. In 2020, the Working Group on Budget Reform held three meetings to discuss proposals to introduce changes to the financial framework of the Organization as well as improvements to the budget regulations, with the aim of aligning the regulations with the current reality. A number of options have been presented, and I thank all of you for your work to ensure that IOM has a more sustainable long-term future.

23. In the absence of reforms, the Administrative Part of the Budget for 2020 remains unchanged at CHF 52 million, while the Operational Part of the Budget for 2020 has increased from USD 1.732 billion to USD 1.940 billion owing to additional funding received for ongoing and new activities.

24. The projected Operational Support Income (OSI) remains at USD 123 million and it is likely that we will reach this target by the end of the year. As agreed at our last Standing Committee meeting, we have allocated USD 10.16 million from the OSI reserve to proposed initiatives to strengthen the Organization in a number of ways.

25. The Administrative Part of the Budget for 2021 is presented on the basis of zero nominal growth, maintaining the same level as 2020. The Operational Part of the Budget for 2021 is based on anticipated funding and is estimated at USD 913.4 million, which represents a 6 per cent increase compared with the amount projected at the same time last year. The OSI budget level projected for 2021 is USD 128 million, taking into consideration current and expected trends.

26. As a final note, I would like to highlight our continued work in the areas of environmental sustainability, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and disability inclusion, and draw attention to our emerging internal conversation on racism and diversity.

27. I am pleased to announce that IOM has become climate neutral for the first time in its history. We have offset the Organization’s emissions by buying carbon credits from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as part of the IOM’s commitment to environmental sustainability. This will be a reoccurring exercise and expense, but one we consider valuable.

28. Regarding PSEA, we continue to support inter-agency activities in this area, offering guidance and technical assistance to humanitarian and United Nations country teams and building the capacity of in-country PSEA coordinators. Last month, colleagues delivered the first global training for PSEA coordinators in an online format, and we continue to strengthen our senior management coordination of PSEA activities across the Organization and are developing an action plan.

29. The Organization's participation in the first year of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy has been a useful opportunity for IOM to raise awareness of the issue internally, consolidate current practices at an institutional and operational level and prioritize impactful actions in the short, medium and long term. This is based on a collective understanding of what is in the best interests of migrants with disabilities, namely reducing barriers and allowing them to participate in society on an equal footing to others.

30. Following my remarks to the Twenty-sixth Session of the Standing Committee on the need to address racism and discrimination and the issue of diversity across the Organization, we have also embarked on an internal whole-of-institution conversation on these topics, including a personnel survey and townhall meeting to discuss the issue with staff. Several IOM offices have continued that conversation at national level and provided additional feedback. Our goal now is to synthesize the ideas we have received into a roadmap for practical action, while continuing the discussion. At the same time, we intend to expand the remit of the Gender Coordination Unit to include a broader range of issues related to diversity and inclusion, such as sexual orientation, racism and disability.

31. As the United Nations celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary, we are reminded of its necessary role in managing truly global tasks. But we are also reminded of the need to constantly adapt to new realities. IOM is working hard, both within the United Nations system and independently, to ensure it remains fit for purpose in a world with pressing challenges to address. I look forward to our discussions today.