

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES AND FINANCE**

**Thirty-fourth Session**

**STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL**



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1. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Council, esteemed guests, IOM colleagues and friends, a very warm welcome to the Thirty-fourth Session of the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance. This is a timely opportunity to update you on the work since we last met in December 2023, to give you a snapshot of our achievements and to outline our progress on our vision that we set forth: to deliver on the promise of migration while supporting the world's most vulnerable.

2. I took up this post 256 days ago with immense gratitude and determination, not just from me but also from my leadership team, that we would work hard to earn your trust, the trust of our Member States, the trust of our donors, the trust of our partners, the trust of our workforce and, most importantly, the trust of the people we serve: migrants themselves.

3. In those 256 days, our senior leadership team has travelled to 51 countries and territories in every IOM region in the world. And we have regularly engaged with you here in Geneva through quarterly regional briefings and through meetings on our strategic plan and our organizational restructuring.

4. Our goal is to engage with you, our Member States, our workforce and the people we serve, as much and as often as possible. And to you I wish to express very heartfelt thanks, because I can testify that I have benefited greatly from your input, from your feedback, even when it is constructive criticism, and from your engagement with our Organization.

5. Esteemed colleagues, this is how we make multilateralism work. Your continued support is indispensable so that we can operate effectively, and so that we can also make sure that we are reflecting your priorities and meeting the needs of people wherever they are in the world.

6. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is no secret that the world today is facing multiple challenges in every corner of the globe, whether they are war, conflict, climate change, food insecurity or economic inequalities, the drivers for migration have never been stronger, including the forcible displacement of 117 million people.

7. But with the record number of people on the move we have seen a narrative emerge; one of chaos at borders and the consequent increase in anti-migration sentiment. When in fact, and we know because the evidence shows us, migration and migrants can be a critical driver of economic resilience, growth and prosperity. The evidence is overwhelming that migrants are a powerful catalyst for sustainable development all around the world.

8. But the system that would enable the world to take advantage of the vast potential of skills and talent and experience has, for years, struggled and failed to meet the needs of migrants, to meet the needs of the communities who host migrants and to meet the needs of the communities that migrants are coming from. And I do not have to tell you that there is proof of this struggle everywhere we look. Millions of people are migrating irregularly and unsafely. Smugglers and traffickers are making USD 10 billion per year off the backs of the most vulnerable. Hosting communities are experiencing stress, particularly those who are neighbours to countries experiencing conflict or scarcity. At the same time, we are seeing labour shortages in otherwise wealthy economies and untapped potential in low- and middle-income countries.

9. We set out last year, with your advice and support, to improve on what IOM does best, but also to rethink the system, to change the way we approach the issue of migration, to design it to do more

than just react at borders and identify opportunities to collaborate with all of you to make migration work for all.

10. We are keeping the foundation of what has worked well, and frankly there is a lot that has worked well, but we are also building something new based on a strategically thought-out architectural plan that we believe can serve the world for decades into the future.

11. When I became the Director General in October, my priority was to bring fresh, innovative thinking and a refocused strategic direction and many of you in this room gave us invaluable input that resulted in the Strategic Plan that we launched in January, a plan that will guide our work through the next five years.

12. The Plan's first objective is the cornerstone of that building and it is what IOM has done well for decades: saving lives and protecting people who are on the move. And when disaster strikes, when crisis forces displacement, IOM will be there.

13. Last year we reached 32 million people on the move and humanitarians know in the deep core of our beings that every single person we serve has dignity, every single person we serve has agency and every single person we serve has worth. Every life is precious and everyone, no matter where they come from, deserves the chance to flourish.

14. But I am sad to stand in front of you today and report that the system is failing the people who need us most. If we are going to make a difference, if we are going to be effective, we must have unimpeded access to those who are in need. We must have the funding to do the job and, critically, when the crisis is man-made we need all of you, our Member States, to get together and to find political solutions to end conflicts and bring peace.

15. These things are true whether it is in the Sudan, where we have reached the astounding number of 10 million people who have been displaced, who are facing hunger at epic levels. Or in Haiti, where blockades and gangs are preventing us from getting access to the people who need us most. Or in Ukraine, where we have already helped millions of people who have been displaced by a conflict that is now in its third year. Or in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the needs were already dire but are becoming more acute and where I am taking on a new role as an inter-agency advocate so that we can bring new focus to the protection and humanitarian issues there. Or in Gaza, where more than 36,000 Palestinians and about 1,500 Israelis have been killed, where the death toll includes at least 266 of our fellow aid workers, many of them from the United Nations family and most of them Palestinians. Where 120 hostages remain in captivity and where humanitarian actors are struggling to get life-saving supplies to those who so desperately need them.

16. We welcome the new ceasefire and plan for hostage release that was backed by the United Nations Security Council just the other day, but we really need action. We need a ceasefire. We need the release of hostages. We need access to people in need and we need the killing to stop.

17. The crises around the world also demand more of IOM: we need to be more agile, we need to be more efficient and we need to respond even before donor resources come in. That is why we are investing in our emergency funding mechanism, we are pre-positioning goods in hotspots around the world and we are doing so in partnership with the private sector, so that when disaster strikes we can get out there fast to those who need us most, even before we get those first donor resources. And we are expanding the capacity of our regional response teams in strategic locations around the world so that we can be closer to the people who need us most.

18. But our real goal, where we make a real difference, is to do more than just respond to crisis and disaster. We do that well, but the fact that we are responding to so many crises around the world reflects a failure to invest in driving solutions to prevent displacement in the first place. So that is our second objective, to anticipate needs before they happen, to create more durable solutions for those people who have been displaced, so that we do not leave them in a protracted state of displacement. Essential to that work is data. Data enables us to better predict when, where and how people will move to help us respond much more effectively. IOM's strategic partners are enabling us to make this happen.

19. We are working with partners within the United Nations system, for example the World Meteorological Organization, to leverage their data to help us understand what is happening on the ground. We are working with Microsoft, for example, to develop data hubs, which will give us advanced data capability, artificial intelligence and the capacity to develop enhanced early warning systems so we can better understand and respond to how climate change will impact communities. And around the world we know, because the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has told us, that more than 300 million people are living in communities that are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. I have seen it first-hand. I have heard it from so many of you. I was just in Antigua and Barbuda as part of the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, and I heard from every Member State there that they are seeing it now. One government minister told me that kids could not go to school because they did not have sufficient water for the bathrooms to operate for the children who needed to use them.

20. The impacts of climate change are affecting communities in ways large and small and our goal is to make sure that we are enabling communities to adapt so that they are not forced to move. That is why we are putting more resources towards engaging with our small island developing States, including in the Pacific where we now have 10 offices and over 200 IOM staff. And I am very pleased to report that the largest number of projects covered by the IOM Development Fund are focused on addressing the impacts of environment and climate change.

21. Perhaps the most vital part, the most forward-looking part of our new architectural plan is encompassed by our third strategic objective: facilitating pathways for safe and regular migration. I want to pause for a moment on this priority because I know that it can be misunderstood.

22. We know the incentives around safe and regular migration are all wrong. What we have heard from speaking to migrants themselves is that the easiest way for a person in a situation of desperation to move is to pay a smuggler to transport them across the world and for that person to seek asylum in the host country, even when they know they will not qualify. And I want to take a moment to appreciate those countries, those Member States who have already opened their borders to millions of displaced people, to millions of refugees, often at great cost.

23. We appreciate that the pressures to respond to irregular migration are high and we know that the status quo cannot continue. But the world needs migration and migrants themselves, the businesses looking for people to work in them and the communities who are hosting people need our collective work to make sure that migration is as safe and orderly and regular as possible. We know that there will always be wars and disasters. We know that there will always be some category of people who are forced to flee. And the right to seek asylum must remain sacrosanct.

24. But no one wants irregular migration to be the preferred route for millions of people every year. For many who are on the move through these irregular channels the system has failed them and often with deadly consequences. Last year more than 8,500 people died while on a migration route. It was the deadliest year on record. And those are only the people we know about; the number is likely far higher.

25. Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, excellencies, we simply must come up with a better way. That is why we at IOM are making investments, we are investing in our regional economic communities in Africa and strengthening the capacity of our Special Liaison Office to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa for trade and border management, protection and emergency response.

26. We are working with the European Union on their newly passed migration pact. We are partnering with the World Bank on their Skills Mobility Partnerships. We are supporting the implementation of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility and with our partners at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees we are supporting the countries of the Americas on the Safe Mobility Offices. These are just a handful of the initiatives that we at IOM are working on with our Member States to advance.

27. It is not that we are abandoning our work on returns and reintegration. When people have no legal basis on which to stay in a country – and every country has the right to decide its own laws – we are working with people to help them get home safely and with dignity and, importantly, to leverage the vast experience and knowledge they gained while working somewhere else in the world. But it is not enough to return people. If we want to build a safer, more orderly and more effective system, we must look at all facets of this puzzle.

28. For example, there is a worldwide need for health-care workers. I hear it everywhere I go: there is a shortage of people who can fill these jobs. But rather than accepting as the status quo that the most developed economies can just extract health-care workers from the more fragile economies, let us instead invest in training more health-care workers as a development objective, so destination and origin countries can meet their needs and the needs of their people.

29. We should also tap much more smartly into the private sector, not just for funding opportunities, but to benefit from their innovative and technical know-how.

30. In 2023, we raised just more than USD 30 million from the private sector and that was twice as much as we had raised the year before. It also means that we have met our objective of raising USD 30 million by 2030, so we are ahead of schedule. We are setting new goals for ourselves and in 2024 we have already brought in USD 16 million.

31. Last year we established partnerships with 33 corporate partners and we have added another eight since the beginning of 2024. One of those is with an organization called the Tent Partnership for Refugees, which was founded by an entrepreneur committed to hiring refugees and migrants. The Tent Partnership for Refugees is a global network of 350 companies all over the world committed to hiring and integrating refugees and vulnerable migrants. The initial focus of our partnership with them will be on Mexico, where their joint efforts in partnership with the Government of Mexico will help displaced talent access jobs in the private sector.

32. We also have a terrific partnership with the small but mighty Talent Beyond Boundaries, which supports creating regular pathways for displaced people and people who are in need of protection. The focus is on training, capacity-building and strengthening networks so that people can do what they do best, which is to bring their human potential to work. Our comprehensive approach to expanding regular, safe migration pathways is designed to enhance economic prosperity all over the world and to do that well we need to be connecting development assistance, migration policy and work that often happens at home, such as urban planning.

33. Why? Because we know, if you are going to bring in more people to address labour gaps in your markets, it will have an impact on social services, housing and health care.

34. Safe and regular migration must protect rights and meet demands for labour, education and family reunification, focusing on the prosperity of both the community the migrant is going to and working in, but also the community she is coming from.

35. This is the kind of migration that would change the global narrative, that would enable the world to see how we can use migration to work for all. And we are investing in our public communications efforts, even within our own Organization, so we can make the case for those of you at home. That is why we have now brought in some 11 new goodwill ambassadors, including very well-known global goodwill ambassadors like Sir Mo Farah and the actress America Ferrera.

36. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, to achieve our strategic objectives we need two things. One is the right people and two is the right funding.

37. For the people, we are investing in better workforce planning and people management. At the field level, we are putting resources in operational capacity to protect the people we serve from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. We now have 73 dedicated staff in more than 50 countries around the world; we are leading the United Nations in this effort. We are strengthening our reporting and internal justice systems to make sure that when people report, there is action.

38. Overall, my goal is to build a workforce where people feel valued and respected and to build a workforce that reflects the diversity of our Member States in all the places we operate and to reflect the lived experience of the people we serve. And I am very pleased to note that we are making some progress on gender equality.

39. Our workforce is now 51 per cent men and 49 per cent women and when I took office I pledged to achieve gender parity particularly at the P-5 level and above, where we do not see gender equity. At the D-1 grade the percentage of women has gone up from 40 per cent to 44 per cent since I took over this role. We still have challenges, we still have work to, but I am confident that the next time we meet I will have even better news to report.

40. But I do not have to wait until the next time to note the recent appointment of our three tremendous women leaders. In fact, I would just like for you for a moment to take a look at this panel and to observe the powerful, incredible, competent and innovative women who are sitting before you here today. It is great news for IOM that the Deputy Director General for Operations, Ugochi Daniels, will continue in her role for the next five years and I am deeply grateful to the Deputy Director General for Management and Reform, Irena Vojáčková, for her tremendous leadership during a moment of change. Our new Deputy Director General for Management and Reform, SungAh Lee of the Republic of Korea, will be joining us in August.

41. And Catalina Devandas, who many of you know so well from her work during our budget reform initiative, has recently started in her role as Senior Director of the Office of Partnerships, Advocacy and Communications. The last time I met with you I introduced you to our newest Legal Counsel Rachel Evers and of course none of this would be possible without the tremendous leadership of our Council Chairperson, Ambassador Katharina Stasch. I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the contribution of these extraordinary women and the one man, Joseph Appiah, for their work to lead this Organization into the future.

42. When it comes to funding, we know that our projectized model is not going away, but we also want to focus on creating flexible, multi-year funding and encourage new and emerging donors. We have been so pleased to see new donors joining our ranks, whether they are from our Member States or other partners.

43. In January, we launched our first ever global appeal asking for nearly USD 8 billion to fully implement our new Strategic Plan. I know that sounds crazy, but our goal here is to shift the focus away from reacting and project-by-project approaches to one that looks at the global landscape and identifies for you where we need the resources to get the job done. By the end of May, 37 per cent of that appeal had been funded. That is good news. But what I am really excited about and even happier to report is that we have more non-traditional donors. Funding from international financial institutions has increased by 71 per cent.

44. We started our reforms because the ad hoc approach that had evolved over the years was no longer meeting the demands of a changing world, and that is something I have heard from every single one of you in this room. And it was also clear to us, and clear to me in my last role responsible for management, that IOM is still growing but the structure to support it is just not keeping pace. So we took on board the recommendations of the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network report and we worked with the United Nations Advisory Alliance, an independent body, to evaluate IOM, to make sure that we were fit for purpose and to help us identify what we needed to do structurally to meet the demands of a world that is constantly changing.

45. We also recognize that we have seen far too many delayed donor reports, far too many unresolved complaints being made to our Office of Internal Oversight and far too little capacity in our monitoring, evaluation and compliance. So we are building that capacity. We are not out of the woods yet. We have serious work left to do. But key to that reform was to identify the inefficiencies, the duplications, the pain points and the structural roadblocks. As part of that effort, after hundreds of consultations with our Member States, our staff, our partners around the world and the United Nations Advisory Alliance, as well as a special session for Member States on 13 May dedicated to the structural review, I can report to you today that the structural review of our Headquarters, global and regional offices is complete. You have received this review as part of the budget documents that we shared in advance of this meeting.

46. Now, the changes had an overarching purpose in mind: to enable IOM headquarters to serve the field better and to help our Organization, which has grown fast over the last several years, to become more interconnected and resilient. The new structure has simpler reporting lines and it increases the accountability of IOM's leadership team at all levels of the Organization.

47. We are also strengthening our commitment to results-based management with the global roll-out of the Strategic Results Framework, which is fully aligned with our Strategic Plan. This is a culture shift within our Organization, but none of this would have been possible without the input of each of you as our Member States and, importantly, without the generosity of our donors, who gave us more than USD 45 million in unearmarked voluntary contributions last year, the highest amount ever.

48. Here are a few examples of what that money enables us to do. It enables us to implement budgetary reforms that helped us save USD 19.4 million through efficiency gains. It allows us to pre-position relief items around the world and deploy people within hours of the time of crisis. And it helps us to develop systems to forecast climate impact on humans around the world, so we know when people will move even before they do.

49. Project funding will always be at the centre of who we are and how we operate, but if we want to deliver on the promise of migration and, importantly, if we want to move away from a reactive, expensive and frankly life-threatening approach to responding to crisis, it is critical that we move toward a more strategic way of engaging.



50. I am pleased to announce that we are creating a donor advisory group, which will be composed of IOM's top government donors. The goal of this group is to foster a deeper dialogue on IOM's operation and reform efforts, to promote alignment in terms of funding priorities and strategic priorities and to create a platform for us to hear directly from you. You will also have access to information on issues that are central to our current transformation efforts, policies and programming, and the wider global context through a migration lens. And we are going to have a special subcommittee within that group, consisting of our top unearmarked donors, where I personally will chair the discussions on the strategic direction and allocation of unearmarked funds that you have entrusted us with.

51. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, friends and partners, in these turbulent times the migration issue has become one of the most important topics on the international agenda and we at IOM have a tremendous sense of the responsibility that that entails for us as an organization. And quite frankly, we owe it to you as our Member States, we owe it to our workforce and we owe it to the people we serve to succeed in this mission. It seems impossible. Everyone asks me all the time, "why would you possibly want to do this?" But I do this work like so many of you, like all of the people that are sitting up here with me today, because we believe. We believe in the power of migration to transform lives. But we also know that this system is failing and unless we engage, unless we work hand in hand with all of you, unless we have your support and your guidance, we cannot be the best that we must be at this moment in time. We are looking to you to build on our shared values, to build on this mutual trust and to have a collective commitment to deliver on the promise of migration for everyone, everywhere.

52. I thank you for the trust you have placed in us and I thank you for the continued commitments that you have brought to the International Organization for Migration. And for those celebrating this Sunday, Eid Mubarak! Thank you very much.