

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES AND FINANCE

Thirty-fifth Session

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

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1. Excellencies, members of the Council, esteemed guests, IOM colleagues and dear friends. A very warm welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance. I would first like to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of our Member States for your support for our work, helping us to deliver on the promise of migration while supporting the world's most vulnerable.
2. Together with my Leadership Team, I would also like to acknowledge that we have the new Deputy Director General for Management and Reform, SungAh Lee, joining us on the podium today.
3. It has been our goal since day one of my tenure as Director General to engage with as many of you as possible, to be genuinely inclusive, whether here in Geneva or in your countries. Your advice and your feedback have been invaluable, and you have been helping us to continuously improve on what we do and how we do it. Going forward, your advice and feedback will remain indispensable as we navigate an ever more complex global environment in pursuit of our goals.
4. We cannot discuss the budget or finance or the policies of IOM without first acknowledging the extremely complex environment in which we work. If we take just a minute, just a snapshot of the state of the world today, the picture unfortunately is grim. A combination of protracted conflicts, climate-related disasters and economic challenges are compelling more and more people to move in search of safety, or simply in search of opportunity.
5. To give just one very stark example among the countless humanitarian crises that are unfolding across the world today, I just returned from the Sudan which many of you know is currently home to the world's largest displacement crisis. It is also one of the most neglected crises in the world today. During my visit, I announced that more than 11 million people had been displaced inside the country, and that is in addition to the over 3 million refugees who have crossed borders in search of safety and security. Unfortunately, the appalling human cost of this conflict and the gap between humanitarian needs and the adequacy of the overall response underlines the very urgent need for political solutions to pave the way to lasting peace.
6. We know that humanitarian response cannot and should not provide a lasting solution, but at the same time, as millions of people's lives are at risk, and as long as political solutions remain elusive, the international community must urgently step up.
7. What I saw in the Sudan really brought home for me the vital role of IOM, not just in saving lives, but in seeking longer-term solutions by bringing together what we do on the humanitarian side with what we do in the areas of peacebuilding and driving development. And it's not just in the Sudan. In places like Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan and Haiti, in Gaza, in so many places around the world that are, at this moment in time, in the midst of crises, and in the midst of challenging geopolitical contexts, IOM is responding and we are delivering.
8. As one of the few agencies that is working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, IOM is at the forefront of the response to urgent and emerging needs. But these needs are vast, and they are increasing at an unprecedented speed. Our challenge is to keep up and to move faster than ever.
9. That means that we have so much more to do to make sure we are fit to deliver on the IOM Strategic Plan 2024–2028, with its three key objectives of saving lives and protecting people on the move; driving solutions to displacement; and facilitating more regular pathways for people to move in safe and orderly ways.

10. It is no secret that the growth in needs and the increasing demands for IOM support has put a significant strain on our existing structures. Over the past year, our budget and our staff have only continued to grow. Our projected total expenditure for this year is estimated to be USD 3.8 billion, which is almost double what it was just a few years ago when I joined the Organization and first came to you asking for your support for budget reform. And our staff numbers are projected to reach 22,500 for this year and 23,500 in 2025, which does not include the 6,000 people we have working on contracts around the world as third-party contractors.

11. On the one hand, this is a sign of the confidence that you, our Members States, have in the work that IOM is doing. But it also means that we must continue to strengthen our structures; we must continue to strengthen our systems. We simply have to invest more in our strategic enablers to put the systems, human resources, policies and practices in place.

12. I want to say thank you to all of you for the increased Operational Support Income that we have projected for 2025. We have the unique opportunity to channel some of these resources to where they are needed most, to alleviate some of the pressures on our core structure, to partially address some of the funding gaps from the staggered roll-out of the budget reform and to reinforce critical management and oversight functions.

13. Our budget reforms, now in the third year of implementation, have already brought us a long way in the right direction, helping to make sure that we are fit for our future. I want to take a moment to highlight some of the areas where we have made some progress and to share with you what our priorities will be for the next year.

14. Now, our first enabler is our workforce - our greatest asset. As I have said to our staff, we can have the best vision, we can have the best strategy that anyone has ever seen, but if we do not have the people in place to deliver the strategy, none of it will matter, and we will not reach our full potential.

15. So, this year we released our five-year People Strategy. It charts a clear way forward and focuses on caring for our staff, nurturing talent and enhancing leadership skills. It also means ensuring that we have an inclusive environment where every one of our staff feels valued, where everyone feels respected and encouraged to challenge the status quo, and where people are able to grow and learn.

16. We have made some good progress in promoting gender equity and geographical diversity, and I am very proud to announce to all of you that we have finally reached gender equity at the D-1 level. Now, I promised you that we would get there, and it is big news that we are here. We are not there across the board; we still have work to do on the P-5 and D-2 levels. But this is real progress.

17. To give you a few more examples, we have now reduced the number of non-represented States from 33 to 28; we have strengthened our competitive and transparent recruitment process; we have launched a leadership development programme to enhance and reshape our organizational culture, placing emphasis on competence and leading by example; and we are increasing access globally to benefits such as pensions.

18. Looking ahead, we are going to continue to revamp our recruitment process, we are going to continue to drive our leadership training, and we are progressively increasing our geographical diversity and gender equity in staffing at every single level.

19. We are also continuing to prioritize partnerships and communications, two key enablers that are closely connected. In line with our Strategic Plan and under the fantastic leadership of our Senior

Director of the Office of Partnerships, Advocacy and Communications, Catalina Devandas, we are engaging across the board with a diverse range of strategic partners, including our donors.

20. We have worked harder to raise greater awareness around the world of global migration dynamics and to amplify the voices and stories of migrants themselves, the communities in which they are living and the countries from which they are coming and which they have gone to.

21. In addition to bringing on Catalina and establishing the Office of Partnerships, Advocacy and Communications to support our institutional partners and our external engagements, we have set up two global offices, one in Brussels and one in Washington, D.C., and we now have seven country offices with dedicated capacity for partnerships and advocacy.

22. We are working hard to secure and scale-up our private sector engagement, including through digital partnerships, and we have welcomed seven new private sector partners. We now have 65 private sector partners, and have generated more than USD 30 million in funding from these partnerships, up from USD 15 million a year ago. It is not enough; there is so much more room to grow, which is why we are strengthening our communications teams, both at Headquarters and in our regional offices, and we are working closely with our 11 Goodwill Ambassadors from around the world. This is producing results: we are seeing increased visibility and engagement, which will ultimately help us to change and positively shape the narrative on migration.

23. Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, we will consolidate and strengthen our efforts across partnerships, across advocacy and, of course, across communications. These will remain institutional priorities for our Organization.

24. A fourth key enabler is our internal systems. Since so much of the funding that IOM receives is for emergency projects and for work in conflict and transition settings, we need to put in place stronger risk and compliance mechanisms.

25. This year, we established the new Office of Internal Oversight; we have decentralized our internal audit and investigation functions; and we are designing more effective evaluations. We also set up a risk management committee to guide the identification, evaluation and management of risks to achievement of our strategic objectives while promoting risk awareness and effective risk management across our Organization.

26. We are bringing on board additional Legal Officers to speed up the review and clearance of our new project funding contracts. We are putting these Legal Officers closer to our country offices and delocalizing their functions, and we are strengthening our audit and investigation capacity. We also set up a new IOM integrity group to strengthen our internal governance, integrity and accountability.

27. In addition, as our operational portfolio expands and the list of people that we are supporting increases, especially people living in fragile environments with weak governance systems, we know that our exposure to operational and financial risks will increase too. Likewise, the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. So, it is more critical than ever that we work to prevent it and to protect the very people we serve.

28. We are also investing in our ombuds and ethics capabilities, recognizing that as we create more confidence in our internal justice systems, the number of complaints and investigations will also grow. So we have to have the capacity to respond. Perhaps, most importantly, and this is thanks to so many of you who supported our budget reform efforts three years ago to make available core funding for our Chiefs of Mission and our Resource Management Officers, we are able to give our in-country

leadership some much-needed capacity to provide the kind of strategic direction, accountability and oversight that you rightly expect from all of us.

29. Going forward, we are going to further decentralize select functions, integrating ethics, finance, legal and ombuds capacity across our regional offices, and we are adding a Deputy Regional Director for Management and Reform into each of those offices. Our goal here is to continuously improve quality control and reporting, without adding a lot of bureaucratic structure, and to consolidate a culture of integrity, transparency and accountability, which is a key principle in the Strategic Plan. It is essential that we uphold the principles and the values that define us, internally and externally. We know that our reputation, our licence and, ultimately, our effectiveness in delivering for the world's most vulnerable people depends on it.

30. Two other closely connected enablers are data and evidence and learning and innovation. These enablers underpin our policies and our practices across the three strategic priorities and are central to internal decision-making and the management of the Organization.

31. Two initiatives to help take us forward are the establishment this year of the new Department of Data, Insight and Policy Coordination under the leadership of our Deputy Director General for Operations, Ugochi Daniels, and the IOM Innovation Facility to seed and pilot new approaches.

32. In 2025 and beyond, we are going to strengthen the impact of our Global Data Institute, including by strengthening the data hubs in each of our regional offices. Our goal is to inform high-quality evidence- and rights-based migration policy and innovative programming.

33. We are not making decisions based on anecdotes, politics or someone's perception of what is happening; we are making decisions so that we can respond to displacement crises, better anticipate where displacement pressures will come from and mitigate future risks.

34. The last, and definitely not the least, enabling function is funding. For now, our operational model is still predominantly project-based, which as you know limits how much we can do and how fast we can move in terms of investing in our core structure. So, we are working hard to move towards more unearmarked multi-year funding while encouraging new and emerging donors, including many of you in this room, and diversifying our funding sources.

35. I would like to say thank you to those donors who do offer unearmarked or softly earmarked funding and ask those of you who have not yet done so to follow suit. Frankly, it does not matter how much you are contributing; the goal is an investment to ensure that IOM can respond to emerging concerns, enable us to meet the challenges of today and of our future, allow us to be more agile and more flexible and ensure that our core structure is fit for purpose.

36. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen and friends, the past year has been intense; ask anybody who is sitting up here on this podium, ask anybody who is working within this Organization. We have been working hard. As you know, with your support and advice, we underwent a major restructuring of our Headquarters, our regional offices and our global set-up, with the goal of empowering and equipping our regional and our country offices to deliver where the needs are greatest. It is now time to consolidate those changes – it is time to build on the results of our efforts so far.

37. To be clear, this does not mean that our work is over. But it does mean that we are now on the right path. So, moving forward, we will continue to build on the three pillars of our Strategic Plan. We will continue to strive for operational and policy excellence where it matters most, on the ground, in places like the Sudan, making a real difference to the lives of people who are internally displaced, to

the lives of migrants, to the communities in which they are settling and to the countries from which they are coming. And we will continue to hold ourselves to the highest standards in doing so.

38. Now, in just three weeks' time I will be back to address all our Member States at our Council meeting. This is an opportunity to provide the Council with a broader update on all of the work that has been happening over the past year: our achievements, our challenges and our next steps. We depend on you to be part of that conversation, and we depend on your continued support, your partnership and your trust. Together, we can – and we must – reach our goal of delivering on the promise of migration while supporting the world's most vulnerable. Thank you very much.