

UK statement

Thank you Chair. Deputy High Commissioner, Assistant High Commissioner and Director,

- We commend the work UNHCR has undertaken this year to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance for refugees and other persons of concern, despite the unprecedented limitations in operating across national borders during a pandemic. Your staff continue to stay and deliver – and we commend them. And thank you Assistant High Commissioner for the trips you have taken alongside Assistant High Commissioner for Operations – these are important to highlight issues faced by refugees.
- The UK appreciates UNHCR’s work in contexts of conflict and violence, including that to support refugees in Tigray, the continued advocacy for comprehensive protection for Syrian refugees and now the difficult work you are undertaking in Afghanistan and the region.
- UNHCR has set out a sobering account of the ways COVID-19 has contributed to a declining sense of shared responsibility and cooperation globally, and how public health measures have taken precedence over commitments towards the protection of refugees and displaced populations, including IDPs and stateless persons. It is worrying to hear that this resulted in instances where the principle of *non-refoulement* was breached and access to asylum denied.
- It is encouraging that the pandemic has become an opportunity to adapt and bring innovation, including through the provision of registration and RSD services, through remote arrangements, making public health responses more inclusive of IDPs, and adapting Sexual and Gender Based Violence response programming by expanding remote case management. We are however concerned that sex, age and disability disaggregated reporting on COVID-19 cases, deaths and vaccinations has declined in humanitarian contexts. In both Somalia and Nigeria, less than a third of vaccinations have gone to women. We hope UNHCR will continue to work with government and partners to identify and target priority at-risk groups, facilitate equitable access and monitor who benefits from vaccine roll-out by collecting and analysing disaggregated data.
- Gender equality is vital to achieving impartial and effective humanitarian action, not least because it harnesses the voices and capabilities of women and girls, alongside men and boys, as leaders, decision-makers, and first responders. The UK remains committed to tackling gender inequality and sexual and gender-based violence in all its forms and to ensure women and adolescent girls have access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and services. We are pleased to see UNHCR’s recognition of programming to prevent and respond to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence as a lifesaving institutional priority and your efforts of doing this in collaboration with community and women-led organisations and local partners.
- Providing Education to girls will be a vital component of this. Education will empower and equip girls to lead change in their countries and communities. We welcome UNHCR’s new 5-year action plan on disability inclusion.

Thank you