

UK Statement - Protection and assistance measures for smuggled migrants (Agenda Item 3)

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to provide comment and thank you to colleagues for sharing their thoughts on what is an important shared concern.

The UK is committed to working with a global network on an equitable partnered basis to address migrant smuggling: looking both at the protection of vulnerable individuals, and at robust and consistently applied penalties for the criminal actors who profit from the exploitation of others. We also reaffirm the sovereign right of states to control their own borders and to establish policies in their own national interest and national security, both in accordance with their obligations under international law.

A comprehensive whole-of-route approach is required. The UK provides assistance to origin, transit and host countries to better respond to and manage large-scale mixed movements. The UK supports regularisation and integration of refugees and migrants, including through access to education and employment opportunities that enable them to contribute to the stability and prosperity of host communities and of origin countries, if and when migrants choose to return, and to send remittances to their countries of origin.

The UK also invests in a range of project work including livelihood programmes, assisting third countries with voluntary returns, as well as more operational initiatives such as border management, disruption of Organised Crime Groups activities and port security.

The UK is committed to supporting countries hosting significant migrant populations, particularly where migrants are likely to attempt to travel onwards into Western Europe and towards the UK.

We are keen to learn more about partners' approaches to these challenges – to share best practice and to identify synergies and opportunities to collaborate where possible in our programming to achieve a multiplier effect on impact.

Many migrant journeys facilitated by ruthless people smugglers are treacherous and life-threatening, including the dangerous crossings made on overloaded and unseaworthy small boats in the English Channel – a route which has tragically claimed lives. The UK, in accordance with the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), works closely with the French Coastguard to ensure that we are ready to respond to incidents posing a threat to life including vessels deemed to be in distress. The SOLAS convention covers all aspects of maritime safety and under this convention the safety of life always takes precedence in Search and Rescue operations.

The UK continues to work with international partners to look at ways to smash the business model of the criminal gangs which exploit migrants and too often place them in harm's way.

Thank You