

Vienna Migration Conference 2022

Key note, Director General

Check against delivery

Vienna, 11 October 2022

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues

Let me welcome all of you to the Palais Niederösterreich and the 2022 Vienna Migration Conference. It is a great pleasure to have you here today but also to have so many of you joining our online screening. We hope that this format will again bring the VMC to the doorsteps of the wider migration community and make sure that our discussions reach out to the broadest possible audience.

Today, we experience perhaps the most challenging times since the end of the Second World War, in terms of the geopolitical situation but also in terms of migration, flight and displacement. A bit more than a year ago, Afghanistan fell to the Taliban and hundreds of thousands fled the country. At the same time Belarus started to pull thousands of migrants from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan to its capital, only to organise their subsequent entry to Poland and Lithuania with the intention to destabilise the Union and sow divisions among the member states. In February, Russia started its aggression against Ukraine, displacing millions of people who found protection in the neighbouring countries and the EU. In June, heavy rains triggered the most severe flooding in the recent history of Pakistan, leaving behind a crisis of a scale that is hard to even imagine. Around the globe, millions of people are on the edge of famine because of the fallout of the war in Ukraine, the disruption of supply chains and the effects of climate change. Soaring inflation and a looming global recession endanger stability and social peace and make us fall behind on our development goals.

Our world faces a number of crises that interact with increasing velocity and severe impact, a situation that is often described as a state of “global polycrisis”. Regardless of the term we want to use, we cannot avoid a basic conclusion: The crisis is real, and the challenges are huge.

At the same time we should not forget about the progress that was made since we met last year in the framework of the Vienna Migration Conference. The unified and robust response by the EU in cooperation with non-European partners put a halt to the instrumentalisation of irregular migration by Belarus. The activation of the temporary protection directive prevented a border crisis from happening and provided millions of Ukrainians with immediate access to protection, job markets and other support. In parallel, the Ukrainian government and its international partners are in constant talks on recovery and reconstruction and the role returning Ukrainians can play in this regard. The work on skills and talent partnerships between

the EU and its partners took some important steps. And although much of the attention was on external events, the French and Czech Presidencies continued the work on the reform of European migration and asylum policy and achieved tangible progress in the steering of the Schengen Area, the operational development of the external dimension or in building a mechanism for voluntary solidarity. But major challenges remain on the European agenda. In the first half of the year the member states recorded a 68% increase in asylum applications compared to last year. Detections of illegal border crossings went up by 75%, along the Western Balkans Route they were almost three times higher than in 2021. Labour shortages become more pressing every year but Europe still misses a coherent response to changing demographics and the implications for our economies, welfare systems and public finances.

About all of this we want to talk during the next day and a half, and the VMC provides a unique platform for doing exactly that. Every autumn, our annual flagship platform offers the opportunity to discuss migration against the background of global trends, unfolding geopolitical developments and the central issues of the migration policy agenda. Meanwhile, the VMC is one of the most important international platforms for high-level discussions on migration in Europe and beyond, always putting the spotlight firmly on the state of play in migration diplomacy and on those aspects in which real progress can be made. To this end, the VMC gathers politicians, decision-makers, practitioners, analysts, researchers, journalists, experts and influencers from the migration community from all the regions that are connected by migration and where ICMPD has been active for many years. It is good to welcome so many of you here today in this special format. Last but not least, the VMC is a unique platform because its agenda emphasises open and frank discussions between high-level actors as much as it provides space for networking, personal meetings and informal exchange. All of which is the basis for effective cooperation and reliable partnership which in turn is the basis for better migration governance.

We have a set of outstanding speakers with us today and tomorrow. They will help us understand the events of the past year and point us in the direction of possible approaches to the great challenges of our time. I would like to thank you all again for joining us here in Vienna, and I invite and encourage everyone to join the debate here in this impressive hall. I very much look forward to our discussions.

Speaking of partnership, I am very grateful that also this year a number of institutions are supporting us to organise this event. I would like to sincerely thank ORS – the Organisation for Refugee Services and the City of Vienna. Your support has been crucial for the successful organisation of this conference.

And now I have the honour and special pleasure to welcome His Excellency Gerhard Karner, Minister of the Interior of Austria, who will share with us his views on the key aspects of the European and global migration agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely hope that you will enjoy the 2022 edition of the Vienna Migration Conference. Now it is my pleasure to hand over to Minister Karner.